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BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,  
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "BONANZA BAND,"  
"DESPERATE DOZEN," "CAPTAIN COLD-  
GRIP," ETC., ETC.

## CHAPTER I. COOLLY DESPOILED.

TEN o'clock at night!

Ferguson Fowler, one of the millionaire bankers of New York, sat alone in the elegant library of his princely home, apparently waiting for some one.

Every now and then he consulted his watch and glanced anxiously toward the door.

Asleep on a sofa, at one side of the room, lay the queerest specimen of humanity ever seen in a banker's employ.

The specimen was human and strangely handsome in the face, although it had small features, a dark skin, and coal black eyes. Ferguson Fowler had made a tour of the world, and, some-where-or-other, had picked

THE HAND OF THE DRAGON CHIEF POUNCED UPON THEM LIKE AN EAGLE AND  
SNATCHED THEM FROM HIS GRASP.

up the person known as Duke Dado, or, Dado, the Dwarf.

An impish creature, not more than four feet in height, with limbs well formed, was the millionaire's pet. He looked as old as his master, whose age was about sixty-five; but he had the agility of a cat, and the keen perceptive powers of the fox.

Duke Dado spoke good English, but his nationality remained a puzzle to all who saw him—a puzzle which neither he nor Fowler undertook to explain.

If Dado was asleep in the banker's house on the night in question, he heard the bell which rung at precisely twenty minutes after ten.

The millionaire gave a quick start when the bell sounded, and Duke Dado vanished from the room.

"My visitor is here at last!" said Fowler, somewhat nervous. "I will soon ascertain what he knows about my prize, if anything. I think I am equal to cope with him whoever he is. By the stars! he shall not drive me to anything. I am master here, and the League, if there is one, as the anonymous letters have hinted—the League, I say, will find me hard to deal with!"

By this time the dwarf had reached the front door and was admitting the man who stood on the step.

Just beyond the curbing stood a closed carriage with two black horses.

A man somewhat muffled, for the night was a cold one, in November, sat statue-like on the box.

Duke Dado looked closely at the man he admitted, saw a well-built person somewhat above the medium height. He was well dressed, wore tight-fitting dark gloves, and looked, in all respects, save one, like a gentleman.

The one drawback, in the dwarf's estimation, was the dark mask that covered one-half of the man's face. It did not fit very closely, but close enough to prevent Dado from getting a glimpse of the features beneath.

"You will admit whoever comes, with no suspicions and no questions," Fowler had said to his strange servant. "Having admitted him, you will go to bed. I will let him out."

The man thus admitted seemed to know where to find Fowler, for he walked straight to the door of the library, and then in without the formality of an announcement.

Duke Dado looked at him with a great deal of curiosity, if not suspicion, and then went up the broad stairs whose velvet carpet gave out no sound.

Ferguson Fowler heard his visitor enter the library and turned to greet him.

As he did so the caller removed the mask, and showed the banker a strikingly handsome face, whose ornaments were a pair of deep black eyes and a large and glossy mustache.

The millionaire-banker looked closely at his visitor, who came forward with a quick, pantherish tread.

He was much younger than Fowler—indeed, the banker was old enough to have been his father.

"I am your caller—the one expected, I presume?" remarked the stranger, taking a seat near the table with his face in the light. "I am the person referred to in the note of engagement—Mortimer Nogg."

"Yes," returned Fowler, "I suppose you are the man, and being such, we will get down to work at once. What is it you want?"

Mortimer Nogg threw a quick glance toward the door.

"What do I want? Ah! yes; we will get to it right away, Mr. Fowler," he said, leaning forward, a new glitter in the depths of his eyes. "We want the papers and the little iron box!"

Ferguson Fowler could not suppress a cry.

He almost left his chair.

"You will oblige me by making no outcry," added Nogg in low and very stern tones. "This is no child's play, and I never enter any fool games. We want just what I've mentioned—the papers and the box! I am acting for the League."

"The League! then—"

"Yes, it has an actual existence," was the interruption. "We have tracked the iron box from its last possessor to you, Ferguson Fowler. It is in the steel safe behind you. Don't look me in the eye and say it is not there. Don't jump from your chair and dash from the room. We have made no false trail; the League never makes one. Come, sir! Produce the objects named, and I will leave you to your conscience."

During this speech the millionaire-banker sat like a person spellbound in his chair. His face had a deathly pallor, and his eyes were riveted upon the cool fellow who looked him squarely in the face.

"You got here by a lie," he said, with a show of defiance.

"I could get here by no other means," was the reply, accompanied by a malicious grin.

"You are not Mortimer Nogg."

"You can bet all your millions that I am not."

"You belong to this League, of which I have been warned."

"I am its chief! Come, Mr. Fowler. We

don't stand on ceremony. The safe is behind you; beyond its doors are the papers and the diamond dragon. You are the only possessor of the combination. Wheel your chair and open the doors!"

But Fowler did not move.

"Can't I hold this man here a little while?" he asked himself. "I have been duped into admitting a double-dyed villain into my house. The Dragon League actually exists, for this man confesses that he is its chief. Dado has gone to bed and is already asleep. It must be getting toward eleven o'clock, and Nydia will be here soon—Nydia and Mr. Carlos. Can't I hold this night-hawk at bay till they come?"

"Ain't you going to open the safe, Mr. Fowler?" ejaculated the man, showing his impatience by his tone. "If you think to hold me here till Nydia and her escort come, you will discover your mistake."

The banker started.

"Great God! they have timed everything!" he murmured. "Must I surrender the articles which are life itself to me? Why didn't my anonymous correspondent tell me that this city Satan was coming to-night?"

Mortimer Nogg leaned toward the rich man with startling suddenness, and clapped his hand on his knee.

"Quick sir!—the safe!—open it!" he commanded. "It will be worse for you if you do not, Mr. Fowler. The League wants only the papers and the dragon to-night; but if you hesitate I will take something else."

"You mean my life?"

"By the eternal heavens, I do!"

Fowler turned toward the safe, a heavy, though not large, steel one, and looked at it with eyes that fairly glared. Something of almost priceless value to him was beyond the burglar-proof doors; but here was a man—a cool, calculating devil—who was trying to make him open it.

"Go to work!" again commanded the visitor, clutching the banker's wrist and pushing him forward. "Your clock, I see, is about to strike eleven. I know who is due then. So open the safe, Mr. Fowler, and give us what we want."

At that moment a little clock on an elegant mantle began to strike eleven; the tones thrilled the millionaire.

"Must I do it?—must I give up that which will ruin me?" he mentally exclaimed. "Wait! I can hunt this League down. I can give the best detective in New York a description of this nocturnal thief—I can set the famous Captain Coldgrip on his trail—I can send him to prison, if not to the gallows! But I don't like to give up anything. It is a foul conspiracy!"

He was almost dragged to the steel safe by the man who had the strength of a giant and whose dark eyes fairly blazed. His fingers seemed to burn their way into the banker's wrist.

"You are here now—at the door of the treasure-house!" he said to Fowler. "You need not waste another minute. Use the combination and produce the document."

Ferguson Fowler mechanically laid his hand on the polished knob before him.

His teeth were pressed together, his face was whiter than ever, and his eyes seemed to blaze.

"I'd give fifty thousand if Carlos would come," he said between his teeth. "By heaven! I'd give a million!"

All at once he looked up at the handsome robber bending over him.

"What is it worth to the League?" he asked. "What?"

"The secret—the papers and the iron box." Mortimer Nogg laughed.

"Is it worth a hundred thousand?"

"More than that!"

"Five hundred thousand?"

The desperate millionaire was taking enormous strides through his wealth.

Mortimer Nogg laughed again over the last proposition.

"We don't want your money," he said. "I am here for the articles several times mentioned. Open the safe—now!"

The baffled millionaire was forced to the steel treasury again; he began to work the combination.

Mortimer Nogg, who was watching closely, saw a spasm of pain pass over his face.

"The safe is unlocked!" said the robber to himself. "We are at the door of Ferg Fowler's millions."

The banker hesitated to open the door he had unlocked—hesitated despite the merciless menace at his side.

"Quick! Why don't you go on, Fowler? Shall I have the pleasure of exploring the mine? Nydia will not come. We have arranged for everything."

Fowler pushed aside the hand that moved toward the safe, and the next moment he swung the heavy steel doors open.

On the inside was another door which he unlocked, and took from a small compartment an iron box about six inches square, and a packet of papers tied with red tape.

He was removing these articles slowly from the safe, when the hand of the Dragon Chief pounced upon them like an eagle and snatched them from his grasp.

The millionaire uttered a sharp cry.

"I take it for granted that the papers are all here, and that the dragon is in its lair!" laughed the cool thief. "This is the first great triumph of the Dragon League, Fowler. From this hour it will enjoy others equally as great. You don't know how we have worked for this success; you know nothing of the disappointments, the failures, the lost trails, the perseverance. We've had a time finding the missing Silas Selkirk; we had to track him all around the world, but the game was worth the candle, and we did not give up. We spotted him at last in New York, the Paris of America. We found him by the strange pet he has."

Ferguson Fowler sprung up with a quick exclamation.

"By Dado?" he cried.

"By your dwarf, Duke!" laughed the man coolly. "Now you will strangle your pet, I suppose, Mr. Fowler—Duke Dado gave you away—for we did not think that Ferguson Fowler, the millionaire banker was—"

"There! you need not go on!" interrupted Fowler, throwing up his hand.

"Very well; just as you like," was the answer. "I suppose you will set some detective on our heels."

Fowler's eyes flashed anew, and his lips met firmly, but he did not speak.

"The League would like a tussle with the New York sleuth-hounds," continued the man.

"By heavens! you shall have your hands full!" snapped Fowler.

Mortimer Nogg said nothing, but took from an inner pocket a small cone-shaped pastille which he placed on the table.

The banker eyed it with much curiosity.

What was the chief of the League going to do?

His mental question was answered by the match which Nogg produced and struck.

The robber held the little flame over the apex of the pastille and a bluish smoke began to rise.

"Great God! are you going to suffocate me?" cried Fowler, putting out his hand.

"Not to the death, I hope," said Nogg, grinning through the smoke, which had an aromatic odor.

"Sit still, Mr. Fowler; the League is exercising a little caution—nothing more."

The banker sunk back into his chair with a gasp. In front of him he saw the triumphant eyes and smiling face of Mortimer Nogg; he tried to fasten them on his memory as he looked.

At last the smoke from the burning pastille seemed to fill the whole room.

Consciousness was leaving the Gotham millionaire; he struggled against the potent spell, but its grip increased.

The handsome face of Mortimer Nogg became the grinning one of a fiend.

"Captain Coldgrip shall avenge me!" passed through the banker's mind, and then he fell back like one dead.

The Dragon League's work was well done!

## CHAPTER II.

### ELEGANT AHAB.

"Ho! ho! ho! The elephant grows on our hands! Let's sell him to Barnum!"

"What do you mean? When did you lose your head?"

"It's here yet, my angelic queen!" and the man who had laughed, tapped his forehead with a gloved hand. "Don't you see the old fellow gets no better? There was too much brain poison in that infernal pastille. But, what do you think, Helen? Shall we throw up the sponge and emigrate?"

"Not till the game is won! not a foot of ground do I yield till then."

The last speaker was a queenly and beautiful woman, whose figure was grace itself. She turned as she spoke from a sweeping mirror, and faced the handsome man who, with a dainty cigar between two fingers, was watching her with sparkling eyes.

"And when, pray, do you expect to see the game won?" he smiled. "Don't you know that ever since a certain night in last November, Mr. Ferguson Fowler, millionaire and banker, hasn't spoken an intelligible word?"

"I know that."

"Don't you know, too, that Dado, the Dwarf, the mysterious piece of humanity who lived with Fowler then, ran away—vanished?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you aware that Nydia, the millionaire's ward, will not let the steel safe be touched; that she says it shall not be opened till the banker recovers his reason?"

"I know all this."

"What can we do?"

"We can wait," answered the woman, calmly

The man flushed.

"It is the same old cry," he said, with exasperating bitterness. "The moment Ferguson Fowler gets his reason back he will send for one of the keenest and coolest detectives in the country."

The woman came suddenly toward the man with clinched hands and sparkling eyes.

"Do you fear him?" she almost hissed, leaning forward. "Are you the man I let into this im-

portant secret? Men call you Elegant Ahab. Shall I add 'coward' to the title?"

"Don't go off like powder!" laughed the man, looking up from his chair into the face, the beauty of which was heightened by her display of passion. "You ought to know that I should fear no living man. What was the League formed for, if this man, for whom Ferguson Fowler will send if he ever recovers his reason, is to frighten us?"

"That is what I say," cried the woman. "You don't look like a coward, Elegant Ahab."

"Thanks for the compliment," was the reply, between two puffs. "I was just saying that we have an elephant on our hands. We can't use our power until Ferguson Fowler recovers. I would give a thousand dollars if I had this velvet hand of mine at the throat of the man who made those pastilles."

"Did you ever ask him about them?"

"I never got the chance. A week after, as I may have told you, the old fellow was found dead in his dingy laboratory, his face devoured by rats. It served him right. I didn't intend to serve Ferguson Fowler the trick I did."

"Well, it was against us," and the woman went back to the glass and began to arrange her abundance of midnight hair.

Elegant Ahab resumed his cigar, and as he smoked in silence did not take his eyes from his companion.

"She's fit to be Queen of Sheba!" he mentally exclaimed. "There's not another woman like her on the continent. I never want her to turn on me, and she would if she should make a certain discovery. When she first sought me out and told me of this scheme with millions in it, I thought her crazy; when she stuck to it, and proved what she said, I believed her in league with Satan. What a beautiful pantheress she is! I will never forget how she looked when she first saw the iron box and the papers that came from Ferguson Fowler's steel safe. She threatened to devour me, and Bowery Burt alone saved me. She says 'wait,' and 'wait' it must be. We've got to wait till the millionaire recovers, if he ever does. Curse that poisoned pastille! I took the word of a mad chemist, and it was a lie!"

It was four months after the exciting robbery at Ferguson Fowler's luxurious home, and the banker was still in a state of mind which excited the pity and curiosity of all who saw him.

Nydia, a beautiful young woman of nineteen, and his ward, came home with her escort one night in November and found him in the library, squatted in front of the steel safe and muttering some incoherent sentences.

Dado was roused from his cot up stairs, and made to tell all he knew, which was not much.

He had admitted a masked man about half-past ten—a man whom his master was expecting—that was all.

Dado did not hear the visitor go, and knew nothing more about him.

There lingered in the library the faintness of a peculiar odor whose identity nobody could fix. It was a singular case.

All efforts to bring Ferguson Fowler back to his right mind met with failure.

The best physicians took the case in hand, and the most they could do was to tell the girl to "hope."

They said that the fumes of some powerful poison had been conveyed to the banker's brain, and that he might in time overcome its effects and regain his reason.

There were some who asserted that Fowler's position when found by Nydia proved that the steel safe had been robbed, and suggested that experts open the treasury.

Upon this the girl, who was mistress in the elegant residence, put a firm veto.

The doors should not be opened until they swung back at the command of Fowler himself! Nydia was determined on this.

Dado, the Dwarf, remained with his mad master for several weeks after the mysterious occurrence, but one morning he turned up missing, leaving no good-by and no explanation for his absence.

Week after week reported Ferguson Fowler's condition the same.

Day after day Nydia was his companion, watching, with that hope inspired by the doctor's decision, for the return of reason.

"Some enormous crime has been committed," declared the girl while she watched him crouched before the steel safe, and muttering like a lunatic. "The blow that fell was well struck and crushing. It took his reason, and may, in the end, take his life. He must know who came that night and what was done. He told me once, two days before the infamous stroke fell, that there was a league against him, but what kind of a league? and for what?"

Nydia never got any further than this.

Ferguson Fowler's strange case had been discussed by the papers. He was a millionaire and a keen dealer on Wall street, and his prominence in business circles was enough to invest his case with public interest.

Let us go back to Elegant Ahab and his beautiful companion.

The man was not widely known in New York, although his handsome person attracted attention whenever he appeared in public.

His garments were the best the tailor could make, his gloves the glossiest in the city, and his person and poise without a rival.

This man was called Elegant Ahab where he was best known, which was at the largest gambling dens of Gotham.

He was never out of money, and nearly always won.

Cool at the table, sparing at the bar, and with manners that captivated whom with all he came in contact, Elegant Ahab was well marked.

Some people had noticed that he was sometimes seen with a man of a different stripe—a person about the medium height, with tapering fingers like a pick-pocket's, with a quick, springy step, and intensely black eyes that seemed to see many things at once.

Elegant Ahab and this man, who was called 'the Fashion's Shadow' were seen at different places; but not for long at one time.

They never went to the lair of the gold tiger together; the keepers of the various dens would have looked with suspicion upon the Shadow, for his long fingers gave him away, if they did not actually stamp him a low criminal.

If the police took any notice of these two men, they said nothing about it.

Elegant Ahab and his shadow were never mentioned at the haunts of the city detectives, although there was something darkly suspicious about their companionship.

Now and then Elegant Ahab was seen at the Park with a woman whose gorgeous costume and rich beauty created a sensation.

Nobody knew her, and few attempted to discover her identity.

Once or twice she was seen to incline her haughty head to a man—a lounging in the Park—and those who saw the motion caught a glimpse of a plainly dressed, gliding figure known to others as "the Shadow."

On the night when Elegant Ahab admired Helen before the mirror, this Shadow, as he was called, was hurrying down a certain street.

His walk was almost a run, so eager did he seem to reach a particular place.

"It has come at last!" he said, between his breaths. "Jehu! I wonder what the boss will say?—and the queen, too? We've been waiting for this ever since Elegant Ahab played his game. Now, I suppose, I'll have to show my hand—I'll have to manipulate some of the man-traps of this great city. Don't I know 'em, though?" and the man laughed. "Don't I know 'em all from the Battery to the Park, along the rivers and all? Show me a city trap I don't know, and I'll show you to be a fool. Who will they set on our heels besides the king sleuth of New York? Sleek Simon, eh? Mebbe they'll add Luke Lynx, or Major Bullseye to the force. Anyhow, the trail's to be taken up at last. I haven't been on guard for nothing this week. I've got news for Ahab and Queen Helen tonight. The Dragon League will have to look out now. I wonder what my orders will be?"

Talking thus, the man hurried along with his hat crushed over his forehead, and his eyes twinkling like stars under the brim.

He was agile and rapid.

"The share's a long while coming, but I guess it'll get by after awhile," he went on, with a light chuckle. "Mebbe we'll have to fight for it, but it'll not be much of a fight if we all combine against one man. What d'yer say, Bowery Burt? I'll feel at home when I git among my old haunts and traps again. Some of the machinery's a little rusty, but I kin soon git it in running order."

This singular person reached his goal at last, and his left hand jerked the door-bell of a well-to-do house.

He was immediately admitted, and the next moment he appeared to Elegant Ahab and Helen where we saw them last.

"Bowery Burt!" exclaimed Ahab. "By Jupiter! old fellow, you look like a man with important news."

"That's just what I've got—news that'll lift you off yer feet," and he threw a quick glance at the woman, who had sprung forward and now stood breathless and eager before him.

"Out with it!" cried Elegant Ahab. "Has death claimed the mad banker?"

"It's worse than that, mebbe. He's got his reason at last!"

The woman uttered a startling cry.

"I told you all along to wait," she said to the velvet tiger. "I knew this hour would come. He is himself again, is he? Ah! what do you say now?"

Elegant Ahab did not speak, but his fingers were seen to tighten on the cigar he held.

"That isn't all," added Bowery Burt.

"What is the rest?" asked Helen.

"He has sent for Captain Coldgrip, the famous detective."

The woman laughed.

"For the captain, eh?" she exclaimed, and then her shapely hand fell upon Elegant Ahab's shoulder. "You know what is to be done now," she went on. "Ferguson Fowler will tell the story of the robbery of the steel safe. He may tell what was in the iron box, but

the contents of the papers, never! We can now begin the real work of the plot—the Dragon League can now push forward its hands. Ferguson Fowler is back to his right mind. The doctors were right, after all; his strong brain wore the poison out. What are you going to do—sit there in your chair and let this New York sleuth-hound pick up the threads of our play unopposed? Bowery Burt, our ally, waits for orders. What is your first one, Elegant Ahab?"

She stepped back and looked at the sport.

"Queen Helen is right," said the wiry man. "I'm hyer for orders."

Elegant Ahab sprung up and threw his cigar away.

"How are your man-traps?" he exclaimed, wheeling upon the Shadow.

"In working order, captain."

"Then we proceed to entrap this trail dog, Captain Coldgrip. We will show him that he fights fate when he fights the Dragon League!"

"That is business!" exclaimed the queen;

"That means victory!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GOTHAM SLEUTH.

BOWERY BURT had delivered a true report. Ferguson Fowler had come "back to life," as it were.

The ingenuity of the Shadow had succeeded in obtaining for himself a quick knowledge of the wonderful change, and, as we have seen, he was not long in transferring his report to the haunt of Elegant Ahab and the beautiful schemer who went by the name of Queen Helen.

The millionaire banker had come back unexpectedly to the rational; the four long months of darkness, insanity and mystery were at an end, and, clothed in his right mind once more, Ferguson Fowler sat in his library waiting for a person for whom he had sent.

This person was not the distinguished physician who had visited him during his dark days; it was not his Wall street partner whom he might wish to consult about the firm's financial affairs. It was a man known as Captain Coldgrip, a detective of note, and said to be one of the shrewdest man-hunters in New York.

The nabob's mind had come back to him in a moment.

His first move was to the steel safe that occupied a prominent place in the library.

The combination came back with the return of reason; he seized the polished knob and manipulated it until he could open the doors.

His first look was into the inner compartment of the safe; then a sudden pallor overspread his face, and he drew back.

"It was no dream! the visit and the theft were reality itself! I was actually robbed! The Dragon League has an existence after all, and I am its victim. Now, let me turn on the vipers!"

He went back to his chair and jerked a cord that hung over his writing-desk.

The person who answered the summons uttered a cry at sight of him, and threatened to run away.

"Come in while I write a message," said Fowler in tones of command. "I am going to show my teeth hereafter."

The next moment he seized a pen and wrote rapidly for a few moments.

What he penned ran as follows:

"CAPTAIN CLAUDE COLDGRIP:—

"No—Mulberry street:—

"You are wanted at No. 1610—street, immediately. I have come back to life, and have work for you."

"FERGUSON FOWLER."

He put this message in an envelope, sealed and addressed it.

"Deliver that as quickly as possible," he said, tossing it to the servant. "Nydia has gone to bed, has she?"

"Yes."

"That is well. Don't disturb the girl. I'll surprise her in the morning."

The man with the letter for Captain Coldgrip was soon on the street ready to catch the first car down-town.

All at once a step came up behind him, and a hand touched his arm.

"Why this haste, Scotty?" a voice demanded.

"Has Old Bullion sent after a doctor?"

"Not this time," laughed the banker's servant.

"He wants a detective."

"Jehosaphat! What put that in his head?"

"Oh, he's come around all right at last!"

"Sane?"

"Perfectly sane!"

The questioner stood like a person thunderstruck for a moment.

He seemed to regard Fowler's change in the light of a catastrophe.

"And so you're going after a detective, Scotty?" he finally said.

"I am."

"Down-town, of course?"

"To Mulberry."

"What is his name?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

The inquisitive man, who was wirily built, with glistening black eyes, gave a visible start.

"Is the captain to come back with you?" he asked.

"Not unless he wants to. I have no orders to fetch him."

"I hope he'll do Ferg Fowler some good. I'm much obliged to you, Scotty, for this information. You won't mention that you gave it to me, eh?"

"Of course not."

"Thanks, old fellow. There comes your car. Now deliver your message at the kennel." And as Scotty moved to take the car which had just come up, his inquisitor, who was none other than Bowery Burt, hurried away.

Ferguson Fowler did not have to wait very long for the person for whom he had sent, for an hour after Scotty's departure with the message his library was entered by a fine-looking man, who announced himself as Claude Coldgrip, as he shook the banker's hand.

"I sent for you, captain," said Fowler, as his eyes sparkled with eagerness. "I am myself once more, and, as my last thought was of you, I naturally recovered it with returning reason. I am now able to give you the particulars of what, but for one thing, would seem a terrible vision, or a blank in my life."

Captain Coldgrip, the detective, settled back in his chair and looked at the man before him. He had heard a good deal about Ferguson Fowler within the last four months; he was rather intimately acquainted with the doctor who had paid him frequent visits, and thus had heard considerable about this somewhat mysterious case.

Now he had no doubt of the millionaire's return to reason. His eyes no longer had the look of the maniac, he spoke coherently and in good voice. In short, everything indicated that Fowler was himself again.

The banker was eager to tell his story, but not more so than the detective was to hear it.

He began at the beginning; he told about the anonymous letters that had warned him against the Dragon League, the persistency of the appeals, the strange communication signed Mortimer Nogg, which had culminated in bringing the chief of the League to his house.

Step by step, as if he knew that the sleuth-hound wanted the whole story, the banker proceeded to the robbery, which he narrated in detail.

The deadly pastille seemed to startle the patient detective as if it had given him a clew.

"You have told me pretty much everything," said Captain Coldgrip when Fowler paused.

"What is missing?"

"A description of the articles taken from the safe."

A spasm of pain and aversion seemed to pass over the gold king's frame.

"Must you have that?" he asked with a visible tremor.

"I must say 'yes.'"

"The articles consisted of a package of papers."

"Bonds?"

"Private papers of great value."

"Well?"

"There was a little iron box about six inches square."

"Containing jewels?"

"Yes."

"Will you give me a description of its contents as near as you can from memory?"

Ferguson Fowler made no reply, but sat like a person dumb before his judge.

His face had not a shade of color, and his look had become a wild stare.

"What!" thought the Gotham sleuth. "Is this man going back to insanity? Can it be that his return to reason is but a ray of light that is about to disappear?"

"Yes, yes—the box!" resumed Fowler suddenly, and then leaning toward the detective, he placed one hand on his knee and continued in a lowered voice:

"It contained a dragon in miniature. I cannot describe it, for it is the most wonderful piece of work that ever came from the workshop of man. The body of the beast is of a metal resembling gold, but when held in the sunlight, its scales have a greenish glitter. Its eyes are diamonds, and its tail, which moves, for it has unseen flexible joints, is studded with diamonds to the tip. As I have told you, captain, this miniature and valuable monster must be seen to be appreciated."

"Where did it come from?" asked the detective.

"Heaven knows from whose ingenious hands."

"But, I mean—"

Captain Coldgrip was checked by Ferg Fowler's wild look.

"I sent for you to find the missing valuables, and to break up this infamous Dragon League!" exclaimed the banker. "The conspiracy, which is as dark as hades, is against me. When they hear that I have come back to life, they will play a new hand as devilish as the one already played. Maybe it will be another terrible pastille—who knows? I have repeated the boasts of the man called Mortimer Nogg, the head of the Dragon League. He came here for what he got—the papers and the diamond dragon. I want them restored intact—I want the whole League hunted down and placed in my power. I want to know what has become of my pet, Duke Dado, who was here when Mortimer Nogg showed his Satanic hand. I

rely on you. I know how you found Richard Redhilt, the murderer, in the depths of Colorado, and the Spanish Bonanza in the New Mexican mountains. I have reasons for thinking that the parties of the Dragon League are new to New York—that I have been followed by them in other countries. I have made a tour of the world, as you may know. Now, captain, you may go to work. I have given you all the clew I can. There is a fortune at the end of your trail. Find the papers and the dragon; run the Dragon League to the earth! Draw on me for any money needed. Only succeed! I believe I sha'n't sleep till you report success. I must have the missing articles back if the hunt beggars me. I have been a fool. I see it now, but I will play a new hand successfully."

Coldgrip saw intense excitement in the eyes of the man who faced him.

"Did this Mortimer Nogg leave nothing behind?" he asked, quietly.

"Nothing! He went away as a snake swims across a pond, leaving no scent."

"You will pardon me," said a voice, and at that moment the door opened.

"Nydia!" exclaimed Fowler, as the figure of his beautiful ward entered the room.

"I could not help hearing your question?" she continued, addressing Captain Coldgrip. "The man who was here that terrible night left something behind, but it was a part of his infamous destroyer."

When she finished she walked to the mahogany writing-desk at one side of the room and unlocked a drawer.

"He left this," she said, coming back to the two wonder-struck men, with a tiny box in her hands. "Here is the base of a pastille that was burning on the table in front of Mr. Fowler when I came home."

The detective leaned forward and looked into the little box; Ferguson Fowler leaned back in his chair and shuddered.

"Can I have this?" the detective asked, looking up into Nydia's face."

"Certainly. I have been preserving it for you," she said.

The next moment the box and its contents were in the sleuth's possession.

"Now, for God's sake, go to work!" cried Fowler, throwing himself forward and clutching the captain's arm. "You don't know the depths of the infamy that confronts me. You will have to deal with villains capable of doing anything. This League is against this pure girl here as well as against me! Mortimer Nogg is an alias; it is the mask of a modern devil—a man who deals with poison pastilles and heaven knows what else. Go! go! It is torture to see you here now. Go to the trail, Captain Coldgrip. I make you my avenger. Go!"

Ferguson Fowler sunk back into the chair exhausted and faint, and Claude Coldgrip, with a look at Nydia, went to the most exciting trail of his life.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SETTING THE MAN-TRAP.

"WORK! work at last! By the holy stars, Floss, we'll be wearing spangles before the month's out. I've got a gigantic game on my hands. I must play it with my old-time keenness an' agility—that's all that's required. You must be the decoy again, an' if you don't draw the wool over his eyes with your fatal beauty, I'll go bail an' shake Gotham forever."

"What is the game like?" asked the beautiful girl of sixteen who listened to words like these from the coarse lips of the man who sat at a poor table in a darkened room in one of the worst quarters of New York, with his dirty fingers encircling a glass which he had just emptied.

"You're right, Floss," he laughed. "You have a right to know what the game is like. As I've just said, you have to act as a decoy."

"Again?" said the girl drawing back as if with aversion.

"Don't you like the trade?" was the response. "Wouldn't you like to wear dresses like the woman I showed you once—the woman who is deep in the big game with Elegant Ahab?"

"Not if I have to commit crime."

The man burst into a gruff, derisive laugh. The girl's face flushed.

"Crime, eh?" he cried, looking up at her. "Crime is it, Floss? When did you string morals like beads? See hyer! Don't you know that we've got to work for what we get?"

"Yes—"

"That's just what we've got to do," interrupted the man who was rather small though well-built, and looked keen and merciless.

"You've played decoy before, but never in a case as important as this one. There's thousands in it for us, there's a wardrobe of duds fine enough for Sheba's queen, an' all for you! Ah! Floss, you don't know how you will shine out in the parks one of these days. Don't talk about crime. I don't want any sentiment hyer. We come straight down to business—plump down upon the game in hand."

The girl called Floss dropped into a chair on the opposite side of the table and waited for the man to proceed. He reflected and emptied his

glass before he proceeded, all the while eying the girl closely from under his dark brows.

"It's something like this," he said at length.

"We can't get a dollar of the boodle till we get a certain troublesome man in our power; that is, Floss, we want him out of the way. I will dictate a certain story for you to tell this man, an' you will play your part of the game to perfection as I know you can. You are to decoy him to a certain house, some of the secrets of which ain't entirely unknown to you."

"To Papa Pangborn's?" exclaimed the girl.

"To nowhar else," snapped the man, giving her a frown.

"I have said—"

Floss stopped suddenly, for she caught the fierce, tigerish glare of the two eyes fastened upon her.

"Well, you've said what?" grated the man, leaning across the table. "Out with it! Don't keep anything back from Bowery Burt."

"I've said that I would never enter that house again," finished Floss.

"By jingo! you shall, and on a business errand, too! You've got almighty good lately, but you don't want to exhibit this holiness when I'm around. Won't go to Papa Pangborn's, eh? You will, an' I know it! Now I proceed."

Bowery Burt, whom we have met before, leaned back again.

"The man we want to catch must be decoyed to Papa Pangborn's," he went on. "He is shrewd, but you can net him, Floss. He is the keenest and coolest man-catcher in Gotham, but not too keen to escape the Dragon League. I am talking about Captain Claude Coldgrip, the 'invincible detective,' as he is called."

Floss started, but the man did not happen to notice, as his eyes were turned away when he mentioned the name.

"Is he after you?" asked the girl, timidly.

"He is after the League," responded Burt.

"Ah! I never told you what happened a week ago?"

"No."

"Ferguson Fowler came to himself. After four months of lunacy, the up-town Croesus is all right again. Well, the first thing he did was to send for Captain Coldgrip, and set him on the track of certain parties. You have an interest in this affair, Floss; you don't want this man-lynx to succeed. What if he should walk in here an' say, 'Bowery Burt, I want you for such and such transactions; I guess I'll take your decoy, too.'"

Floss uttered a quick cry of alarm, forced from her by the coolly spoken words.

"He's liable to do this some day if we don't show our claws under the velvet," he went on. "Now, all depends on entrapping this lynx. The big game against millions will fail if we do not succeed. I am going to send you to Captain Coldgrip."

"When?" murmured the girl.

"To-night. I can't go myself, for I'm not of the material of which decoys are made," smiled Burt.

"Doesn't he know Papa Pangborn?"

"Not as we do, Floss. This little dried-up specimen of Jewry is the sharpest man in New York. The police think they know him when they don't know him at all. Captain Coldgrip has been to his house, but Papa never showed him one of the dozen man-traps it contains. The detective has let the old Jew help him along with one or two games. You can get him into Papa Pangborn's. I would fail. He would look into my eyes an' say, 'Oh, no, Bowery Burt! Thar's nothin' green in my optics!' Don't you see?"

Floss made no answer.

She knew she was in the power of this villain of villains, that she was wholly in his clutches. She had known Bowery Burt from her childhood; she had no recollection of any friend before him, and yet she knew he was not her father.

Her life had been spent in the plague-spot of New York, within a stone's-throw of the famous Five Points, when that quarter was at its worst; her associates had been criminals; she had grown up almost to womanhood surrounded by crime, yet she loathed the appearance of evil, and would have fled but for the restraining power of Bowery Burt.

A thousand times she had planned to break her bonds, but the watchfulness of the Bowery bat always prevented.

We have seen that the girl gave a start when Bowery Burt spoke the detective's name.

Had she heard it before? Had she seen Captain Coldgrip in the haunts of vice?

She was to help entrap him now; she was to deliver him over to the Dragon League of which she had heard Bowery Burt tell even before the opening of our story.

She shuddered—she could not help it—when the little villain told her that the detective knew nothing of the true character of the man called Papa Pangborn.

Floss had seen enough of him to read his character to the bottom.

A little Jew with all the subtlety and chicanery of the most artful of his race—a man who could smile on the person he longed to strangle with his oily fingers—a miniature Satan in flesh!

This was Papa Pangborn.

The girl had entered his house; she had been forced to enter it with the threatening hand of Bowery Burt over her. She had seen more than one hidden trap-door there, more than one devil's snare.

No wonder she recoiled when she was told that she was expected to decoy Captain Coldgrip into this place, and the more so when she thought it could be easily done if he considered Papa Pangborn his friend.

But Floss was in the meshes yet, and Bowery Burt knew that he had but to threaten with his eyes to force her to the play.

"There's a spangled wardrobe an' a better house than this," he said, glancing around the room in which he and the girl were seated. "You want better quarters, don't you, Floss?"

The girl said "yes" mechanically.

"We'll move up-town, right into the heart of gold-dom, hang me if we don't!" and Bowery Burt brought his fist with emphasis down upon the table. "Mebbe we'll sport a drag on the Avenue one of these days. Elegant Ahab an' Queen Helen could do that if they like; but, you see, they can't begin to play deep till we've dealt with Captain Coldgrip. I wish I could choke that man without further ceremony, but I don't want to fall into the grip of that ice-cold hand of his. Get him into Papa Pangborn's, Floss, my seraph, and the diamond dragon which you shall see some day will get in its work."

"You have spoken so often about that thing," said the girl, her countenance lighting up. "I would like to see it."

"You shall, I say!" exclaimed Bowery Burt. "Play your game well to-night, an' I'll show you this wonderful object. Jingo josh! girl, if I had the dragon's scales, you wouldn't see Bowery Burt hangin' round a place like this. Now let me come down to business for good."

The Shadow filled his glass for the fifth time, and continued:

"You will find Claude Coldgrip between nine an' ten o'clock to-night at his room at Number — Bowery. You will take him an urgent message from Papa Pangborn."

"Have you got it?" asked the girl.

"No, but you shall have it before I go away. You will tell him that you are now living in the house, an' you will go back with him—in short, you are to see the man-fox safe in the trap."

The girl cast down her eyes and remained silent.

"There must be no failure, Floss," Bowery Burt went on. "If Captain Coldgrip hesitates, you will tell him that the affair hinted at in the note is even more important than it appears. You know how to do these things. By Jupiter, girl! I would undertake to hoodwink Mephistopheles with you. You need not think that the man-hunter will not go; he will; the letter will fix that for certain. Bring me pen an' ink."

The girl went to a little shelf on the wall and took down a common little secretaire and pens and ink. The next minute she had placed them on the rough table before Bowery Burt who drew his chair up and seized the pen.

"I'm goin' to make the throw a sure one," he laughed, glancing up at Floss, and then bending forward he went to work.

For several minutes he wrote slowly and painfully, for, whatever accomplishments Bowery Burt had, if any, he was not a practiced penman.

But he kept at his task until he produced the following:

"MY FRIEND CAPTAIN C---:

"For Heaven's sake come quick to me. I think I have my hand on a bird you want. All is quiet here now. I have news of Jacapo; I am sure I have. The bearer, my new child, is trustworthy. She will be with you.

PAPA P---."

"How's that for a bait?" laughed Bowery Burt, tossing his production into Floss's lap. "It isn't copper-plate, but it's a fair imitation of Papa Pangborn's scrawl, which I have seen on several occasions."

The girl took the letter up and read it in the light of the lamp.

"How's our sick man overhead?" asked the rascal, glancing toward the ceiling.

"I haven't heard him to-day," said Floss. "I am to take this to Captain Coldgrip, am I?"

"Yes."

Floss slipped the note into her bosom without a word.

"Remember! if this game succeeds, an' it shall, silk attire an' a new home!" Bowery Burt ejaculated, springing up. "You will outshine Elegant Ahab's queen. Play the scheme well, Floss."

"Where will you be?" asked the girl.

"Whar I should—at Papa Pangborn's!" was the answer.

At that moment a very small hole in the dark ceiling was covered up, and if Bowery Burt, the Shadow, had entered the room of the sick man, he would have seen a singular looking person rise from the floor!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE NIGHT HAWK'S CATCH.

FIVE minutes later Floss was on the street. The girl had for a moment a wild, bewildered look, and the lamplight fell upon her pale face and bloodless hands.

For all this, she was beautiful, there was a willowy grace about her figure that rendered her doubly attractive, and she did not look like a person whose companion and friend was a character like Bowery Burt.

For several moments she stood in front of the house as if undecided as to her next action.

"I must do this," she said to herself. "I must go to the detective's; I must decoy him to Papa Pangborn's, I must help along his scheme against human life. Oh God! why am I bound to this man called Bowery Burt?"

"What yer stoppin' for?" growled a coarse voice behind her, and the girl turned with a shudder to see her friend. "Don't yer intend to set the trap? Move off, or by the holy heavens! it'll be the worse for yer!"

Floss sprung away with a startled cry as if eager to get beyond the sound of that voice now dreaded more than ever before.

"She's been gettin' scruples lately, that girl has," muttered Bowery Burt, watching her. "I don't want any such things about me. I won't have 'em in her head, either. Gone, has she? Now I'd better take a short cut to Papa Pangborn's, an' get the trap oiled by the time he comes."

He walked to the first street, sprung around the corner and was gone.

Floss kept on until she had put several squares between her and her home.

She looked back with furtive glance, but could not see the figure of Bowery Burt.

"Ah, here you are, my seraph," said a voice at her side, and the next second she was looking up into the shining eyes of a young man, almost faultlessly attired. "Don't skip from me now. This is a pleasure totally unexpected, but a pleasure, nevertheless. Going uptown, eh? So am I."

Floss felt like drawing back.

She had met this man before; she knew that he had followed her on the street, and she did not like his oily tongue and his expressive eyes.

"Aha! you need not try to run away!" he went on, seeing Floss's aversion. "I want to see you on special business."

"Me?" cried the girl.

"You, my angel."

She recoiled a step. His manner, obsequious before, was becoming insulting. He had assumed a boldness which, until that moment, he had never shown. He caught her wrist as he uttered his last words.

"You have just come from Bowery Burt, have you not?" he said.

"What if I have?"

"It matters a good deal to us," was the answer. "Here is the house of a friend. Come into the hallway, Floss."

Floss drew back the length of his arm, and threw a frightened look around.

She was midway between two not very brilliant lamps, and the sidewalk was almost deserted.

Nobody knew the reputation of that part of Gotham better than the startled girl. She knew that a woman's scream would attract very little if any attention, and the blazing eyes of the man who had stopped her said that a cry from her lips would do no good.

He dragged her toward a door, and seemed to laugh at her efforts to escape.

"Don't make a scene, Floss," he said. "This is only a sideplay to the big game."

She looked at him amazed. What did he mean?

He took the knob of the door and pushed it open; he almost lifted the girl from the ground as he took her into a darkened hall which led to a flight of steps.

"Have you got the bird, Foxy?" asked a voice, whose owner Floss did not see.

"I've got her."

"All right. Blindfold her and fetch her up."

A cry for help came to Floss's lips, but the sudden tightening of the hard hand at her wrist kept it back.

In a moment a silk handkerchief was pressed over her eyes and tied behind her head. It seemed to be the work of a man who was up to such things.

The next minute Floss was ascending the stairs in the arms of her captor.

She mentally tried to count the steps, but gave up when her brain seemed in a whirl.

In a little while the top of the stairs was reached, and the blindfolded girl was carried across a room.

"Put her down, Foxy," ordered the same voice she had heard when at the bottom of the steps, and Floss was seated in a chair.

"Now, my girl, you will answer a few questions, and answer them satisfactorily. You have just left Bowery Burt?"

Floss was thinking fast. What should she do—oppose these men and show them a bold front, or let them have their way and answer their interrogatives?

"You will make nothing by keeping a silent tongue," the unseen man went on. "We know your fox-like friend, and we want a little information—that is all. You have just left him?"

"I have," Floss assented.

"That is right," laughed her questioner.

"You are off on an errand?"

Floss was silent.

The message to Captain Coldgrip—the decoy letter—was in her bosom.

"He never sends you out at this hour for nothing," the man went on. "Bowery Burt is sending you to a game; you know it. You are going to play decoy again. Do you remember when you played it last?"

The girl started.

"Let me tell you, Floss. The last man you decoyed into Papa Pangborn's angelic establishment effected his escape. He is before you now."

Floss uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Then you must be the Raven," she said.

She heard the two men laugh in concert.

"I am the Raven," was the reply. "I had a time getting out of the trap; they think me there yet, the fiends! It was all because I suspect something—because I got onto the game Elegant Ahab and his pards are playin' in Gotham. Isn't this true, girl?"

Floss made no answer.

"Come back to business, Rob," said the man who had captured the girl.

"I will. Floss, we don't want to hurt you, but we want all you know about the scheme," he said.

"What scheme?"

"The big one—the one that put Ferguson Fowler, the millionaire banker, out of his head; the one that makes Elegant Ahab, Queen Helen an' Bowery Burt pards. We want to know where they keep the swag the banker lost the night the blow was struck. It isn't in the steel safe now. They have it in their clutches, and you know where it is."

"You have come to the wrong person for information," said Floss quickly and with firmness.

"No lies!" threatened the Raven. "This is the deepest game ever played in Gotham. The best man-lynx in the city is on the trail. He is playing against all of us. There is a wheel within a wheel. We are the inside wheel. We are playing against the Dragon League and Captain Coldgrip. You don't want to misunderstand us, girl. When the Dragon League discovered that I was getting onto their scheme, Bowery Burt ordered you to decoy me into Papa Pangborn's. You did it, for then I did not suspect you, Floss. Jupiter! the horrors of the inside of that place make me shudder now. But, never mind—I am out—the only hoodwinked victim that ever escaped, I suspect."

"You're getting off the track again, Rob," Fox reminded him.

"So I am! Curse it! I can't keep from that infamous house when I approach it," was the answer.

"Where is the swag, girl?"

"I don't know."

The next moment a hand clutched the young girl's arm.

"I've got a grip as famous as Captain Coldgrip's," was spoken in her face. "Do you mean that for your final reply?"

"I can give you no other, declared Floss.

"Think a moment. Don't make it final, for we believe you know where the swag is."

Floss shook her head.

"All I know I have told you," she persisted.

"By J-e-u! you know more! you know that the man who smote Ferguson Fowler with lunacy was Elegant Ahab; you know that the articles secured that night are of priceless value; you know that the Dragon League is playing for still bigger stakes. You are off on a mission for it now. Tell what you know."

A strange giddiness took possession of Floss, under these words.

"Catch her, Foxy!" she heard her persecutor exclaim, and the next second her brain reeled and all was dark.

The man called Foxy caught the swooning girl before she touched the floor, and the Raven who was a powerfully built man of forty or thereabouts uttered an oath over the catastrophe.

"What will we do with her?" asked Foxy.

"She knows more than she told," was the answer. "She must remain in our net till we get what we want. When she comes to I'll fetch her around. Carry her down and then come back to me. Isn't she a beauty Foxy?"

Foxy's eyes were already fastened on Floss, and he was admiring her loveliness as she lay unconscious in his arms.

"Hold on! let me look at her" the Raven went on, coming up to Foxy and bending over the girl. "I wonder where Bowery Burt picked her up? There's good blood in her, Foxy—blood good enough to run on the avenues. See how finely chiseled her features are! I used to be a good judge of humanity—before I went into this business. Her life in the plague-spot hasn't made her coarse of feature. I'd like to hold Bowery Burt up some day an' make him tell me all he knows about his decoy. Take her away, now."

The big man was alone in a moment, and no sooner had Foxy disappeared with the girl than he exclaimed:

"Jerusalem! what if we were at the beginning of a new game? But it cannot be. There is no resemblance that I can see. It's not worth thinking about. She knows, an' she must tell! I am going to get a grip on the Dragon League if I have to do that which I have never done in all my wild career. The stake is worth the game. Hello, Foxy! Back a'ready?"

Foxy had made a short trip and stood before the Raven, ready for orders.

"This fell out of the girl's bosom," said Foxy, tossing his companion a piece of paper.

Raven Rob caught it and began to read.

"Heavens! she was on her way to decoy Captain Coldgrip into Papa Pangborn's!" he exclaimed.

"Floss?"

"Yes—that girl! She came from Bowery Burt, you say?"

"I saw her leave the house," answered Foxy, positively.

"Ah! don't you see the game? The whole gang is into it! Papa Pangborn writes the message an' gives it to Burt for delivery to the girl."

"It is plain to me now," Foxy answered.

"We spoiled the girl's mission. Jupiter Pluvius! I wish I had let her go on."

"Why?"

"She would have succeeded in decoying the Gotham Sleuth into the old man-trap. We want him out of the way, an' here Bowery Burt was putting him there. This is exasperating, Foxy. If we could get this message to the detective—"

"We can!"

"But it says that the bearer is a girl, an' that she will accompany Captain Coldgrip to Papa Pangborn's."

"That is just what will be done," decided Foxy, showing his teeth with a grin. "You recollect how I used to act women parts on the variety stage?"

"Yes."

"Well, I haven't forgotten my schooling. Give me the note, Rob. Bowery Burt's programme shall be carried out, after all."

"By you, Foxy?" demanded the Raven, in amazement.

"By me an' no one else!" was the response, and the smooth-faced fellow's eyes twinkled wickedly. "Let me show you a hoodwinking game that will discount the one Bowery Burt had in hand. Captain Coldgrip goes to Papa Pangborn's as certain as fate. I make an excellent girl."

"Look out for the cold hand, Foxy," said the Raven.

"I'll keep an eye on that. We can't afford to miss this chance of silencing the dangerous enemy."

## CHAPTER VI.

### WEASEL AND FERRET.

THE "dangerous enemy" seemed in a fair way to be silenced, for, while the two villains were coolly plotting his destruction, he was the tenant of a small room not many blocks away.

Captain Coldgrip had a new case in hand, and it had been given him by Ferguson Fowler, the millionaire banker, whose somewhat startling return to reason has already been mentioned.

He was the only occupant of the room which was on the second floor in the middle of a block of buildings.

"I haven't done much yet, but I think I have picked up a thread," he said to himself. "Fowler wants this business finished at once; he has no patience; he wants his papers and his dragon back; he can't wait a minute, he says. Well, he may have to wait days."

After a while a slight, timid knocking at the door behind the city sleuth attracted his attention.

He crossed the room and opened the door.

"Ah! what is it, my girl?" he said to the person who stood before him.

"I have a letter for you," was the reply, and the speaker, who looked like a girl of seventeen, plainly dressed and not unhandsome, slipped across the threshold.

"Let me have it," and Claude Coldgrip extended his hand.

"Are you alone?" asked the girl, glancing about the room.

"Perfectly so. Give me the letter."

The detective's caller produced a piece of paper somewhat crumpled and extended it.

"Aha!" ejaculated the man-hunter, and the girl saw his eyes get a sudden glitter when he glanced at the signature.

"Are you to go back with me?" he asked, looking at the girl.

"Yes."

"It is not necessary. I may not go for some minutes."

"I think it is *very* important," was the answer. "Papa said so when he sent me here, and I don't think he would want to fool you."

"What do they call you?"

"Madge."

"What is your other name?"

"I never had any. I've always been Madge, I guess. You'll go down to Papa Pangborn's with me, won't you? I don't like the streets at

this time; but, then, I don't want you to think me afraid."

Captain Coldgrip smiled.

He did not know why any one who lived with Papa Pangborn should be afraid of the streets of New York, even after dark.

While he knew that the old Jew was not strictly honest, he had never caught him in any mean action; therefore, Madge, who lived with him, ought not to fear the journey back.

"I'll go with you!" said Captain Coldgrip at last. "I'll see what the old fellow wants, anyhow. He claims to have information about Japico, the old chemist who used to have a good trade in dangerous pastilles: but I fear Papa Pangborn is on the wrong scent. Are you ready, Madge?"

"Ready when you are."

The two left the room together and faced the cold wind that swept the street below.

There was a victorious glitter in Madge's eyes whenever she looked at the detective.

"Raven Rob thought I couldn't play it, but ain't I doing it glorious?" passed Madge's lips. "They say there are some foxes that can't be caught at all; but I don't believe it. Here I've got the boss reynard of Gotham in a deadly snare, and he doesn't suspect. When you want a cool game played, come to Foxy Funk. He's the winning trump—always!"

If Captain Coldgrip had heard these words which were spoken mentally at his side, he might have given Madge, his companion, a close scrutiny.

"We don't want a car, eh, Madge?" laughed the detective.

"No car for me!" said the masquerading villain, and he seemed to draw back from a ride in the well-lighted car which would give the city sleuth-hound an opportunity to study his face.

Claude Coldgrip knew the location of Papa Pangborn's three-story quarters.

They were not far from his own room, and a few minutes' walk would land him at the Jew's door.

As square after square was measured, Foxy's eyes shot gleam after gleam.

He was in his element, and in fancy he saw the detective beyond Papa Pangborn's threshold, and, of course, in one of the many mantraps the infamous building contained.

"We can't do anything against the Dragon League while the captain is at large to hunt for the banker," said Foxy. "All's fair in love and war, they say, and this is war."

War it was, and war to the knife!

"We're almost there, Madge," said Captain Coldgrip, glancing down at his companion, as they turned another corner. "Papa will be waiting for us, eh?"

"He don't sleep much, seems to me," was the reply; and then the pretended girl laughed: "Isn't Papa Pangborn a queer one?"

"Queer in many ways," said the detective. "When did you come to him? You weren't there three weeks ago."

"I came two weeks ago to-night."

"The city has always been your home?"

"Always."

"And you don't know any name but Madge?"

"Madge—Madge!" simpered Foxy; and he wondered what Captain Coldgrip would give to know that he was playing a game against his life.

At last, by looking down the street they were now traversing, Foxy imagined he could see Papa Pangborn's quarters.

His heart gave a great leap at the discovery.

The goal was almost won!

A few steps further on, and he saw the Jew's house, and at the same moment almost he met a man on the street.

There was nothing uncommon about the meeting, for Foxy had met scores of people since leaving the detective's room; but this last person caught his eye as none of the others had done.

It was Raven Rob, and Foxy saw in the quick glance, that his partner was astonished at his success.

"I wonder what the Raven thinks now?" ejaculated Foxy. "He thought I couldn't hoodwink the fox I've got in tow. It takes a keener eye than Claude Coldgrip carries in his head to penetrate the disguises I have at my command. I'll make you set up the champagne when we meet again, Raven Rob, and you'll elevate your estimate of Foxy's shrewdness. Ha, ha! old fellow—the weasel has caught the ferret!"

Raven Rob, who was seen for a moment only, had already disappeared.

"I'll go bail if I would walk ten squares with that cold hand loose at my side!" he had exclaimed, after leaving Foxy and the detective. "But Foxy is in earnest in the game on hand. He is taking Captain Coldgrip to certain doom, for Bowery Burt would send no decoy out if he had not completed arrangements for the Gotham ferret's destruction. I owe you one, Foxy!"

Meantime, the detective and his companion had nearly reached Papa Pangborn's house.

The exterior of the building was not very prepossessing. The lower story windows were fur-

nished with shutters which were seldom open even in the daytime, and the upper story lights were heavily curtained within.

Just before Captain Coldgrip reached the step, a boy rushed past him.

At the same time he felt something thrust into his hand.

Foxy saw the boy, but not the strange action.

"Wait—just one moment," said the detective, and then he stepped toward a street lamp near by.

Foxy opened his eyes for genuine astonishment when he saw Captain Coldgrip unfold a piece of paper.

"In Beelzebub's name, where did he get that?" exclaimed the disguised decoy. "It can't be that he has been warned? No! it must be the message I carried to him—Bowery Burt's. He wants to take another look at it before he pokes his head into the death-trap."

Foxy's eyes might have leaped from his head if he could have looked over the ferret's shoulder at the one line which had been hastily scrawled on the paper he had just unfolded.

The detective himself was wonder-struck.

The one sentence was brief and told it all.

"The person with you is Foxy—a man spy!"

Captain Coldgrip took in the whole message at a glance.

He exhibited no signs of excitement, although the warning was enough to send a thrill through him.

He appeared to be reading a letter long enough to have been the one with which Foxy had been decoying him.

This encouraged the watching weasel to think that it was Bowery Burt's letter.

At last the detective came toward him.

He betrayed himself by no emotion.

"The play is won," said Foxy to himself. "This is the boss game of my eventful life."

The next moment Captain Coldgrip said with a smile:

"Well, here we are, Madge, my girl, at the house of Papa Pangborn. Now, if you will get the door open, we will greet the old fellow inside."

With glittering eyes Foxy mounted the two steps and jerked the brazen knob of the bell, for Papa Pangborn was aristocratic enough to make his visitors announce their arrival by the modern bell.

There was a far-away silvery tinkle beyond the door.

At the sound Foxy's eyes got a new gleam that seemed to set them dancing; as for Captain Coldgrip's eyes at that moment—they glittered!

A minute's silence followed the dying tinkle of the bell; Foxy grew impatient.

He had his mind made up.

He knew that the hallway beyond the door was never well lighted, and, trusting in the disguise which he thought was safe still, he expected to escape from the house before Papa Pangborn could discover the deception.

"Here comes Papa," said the detective, as footsteps were heard beyond the door, and then the knob turned and the door itself was opened by some one on the inside.

"Walk in," said Foxy to his companion.

"No, you go first!" and the hand of Captain Coldgrip fell like a hammer upon the villain's shoulder.

Foxy started back and uttered an exclamation of terror.

"The jig was well played, but it is up, Foxy-Madge!" hissed a voice at his ear, as he was lifted bodily from the steps.

"Jupiter Jingo!" cried the thunderstruck decoy. "Shut the door! For heaven's sake, don't throw me into that trap!"

"Oh, yes, Foxy. In you go!" laughed the city ferret, and the next instant he threw the decoy above his head and then hurled him with crushing force into the house.

"I'll see you later, if the devil preserves you!" were the words Captain Coldgrip sent after his victim. "You can shut your door, Papa Pangborn. I guess the mask you've worn has been pulled away!"

The detective heard a strange cry inside, and the next moment the door was shut in his face.

"What was it?—what did he do?" cried the man, who bounded to the old Jew, who stood like a statue of fright in the hall.

"Holy Abraham! I was nearly dead!" was the reply, and Papa Pangborn's face did not belie his assertion. "Dat man-ferret come, but holy heaven! he throw Floss like a bullet through the house!"

"Floss! Curses on him! he didn't do that, did he?"

"Go an' look. I am not myself, Bowery Joseph's goat! who put dot man onto der scheme?"

The man who turned from Papa Pangborn and went toward a dark object lying in the hall was Bowery Burt of the Dragon League.

He set his teeth hard as he bent over Captain Coldgrip's victim.

"Jehosaphat! Papa, come here!" he suddenly cried.

The old Jew tottered forward.

"Look!" said Burt, looking up and pointing to Foxy. "This isn't Floss, but a man! I sent

the girl to decoy Captain Coldgrip here, but this is a man in borrowed plumes. In God's name, where is Floss?"

Papa Pangborn was speechless.

#### CHAPTER VII. FOLLOWED AND LOST.

"DISCOVERED just in time!" muttered Captain Coldgrip as he walked back from Papa Pangborn's. "I have dealt with disguises before, but never with one like that. This trail is growing interesting. Let me see; I have an engagement with Ferguson Fowler to-night. I will move toward his house. The New York Creesus will be somewhat disappointed over the report I have to make, but I want a little light on a certain subject, and I will improve the opportunity to get it."

The detective turned into the first street he struck, and waited for a car.

While he stood there a man who was powerfully built, and looked like a cool fellow, had his eyes fixed upon him.

"He didn't stay long at Papa's," this man mumbled. "Can it be that Foxy failed to accomplish his play? He had the captain in tow when I met him awhile ago, but here is the ferret alone. Where is Foxy?"

Captain Coldgrip could have answered this question, but the watcher did not bother him with it, and he saw the sleuth board the first car that came along.

"Going somewhere, eh, captain?" laughed the big man. "I'll pass a little time in shadowing you." And a moment later he swung himself upon the same car.

It was about ten o'clock at night, and the car was comfortably filled.

Captain Coldgrip walked inside and took a seat, while his watcher stood on the rear platform, and watched him furtively through the window.

The car kept on; the man on the rear platform grew uneasy.

"Is he going to take me to the polar regions?" he growled. "Foxy's play must have given you new business, Claude Coldgrip. Hang the luck! When are you going to get out?"

If the detective was trying to worry the watchdog at his heels he was succeeding in an admirable manner.

Finally, however, the chase seemed to come to a close.

Captain Coldgrip left his seat hurriedly and passed the spy on the platform.

"He didn't recognize me," the man murmured. "He doesn't know I have anything to do in the game."

The city ferret left the car and walked toward a line of cabs that stood in front of a well-known hotel.

"He's going to try another mode of locomotion," laughed the big man. "Go ahead, captain; you will find the Raven at your heels wherever you go."

Claude Coldgrip accosted the driver of one of the cabs and the door was immediately opened to him.

The Raven leaned forward to hear the order, but failed to catch it in its entirety.

The cab started off with the detective on the inside.

"Not yet, my Gotham tracker!" exclaimed the big man, and then he walked to the driver of the next cab.

"Did you ever follow a cab?" he asked.

"More than once, sir," said the driver, grinning.

"Can you shadow the one that just started off?"

"I can."

"Then do it. Money is no object. You will stop when I issue a command to that effect."

In a minute the Raven, Foxy's old partner, was again in the detective's wake, and a new race had begun.

"I'm a weasel if I am a big one! Ho! ho! captain. Sly as you are, you can't make many unobserved moves in this game."

The Raven knew the great city well.

Every now and then he glanced out and recognized the buildings on either side.

He thought himself in luck; he did not believe that the detective had taken more than a passing notice of him.

Of course they had stood face to face on the platform of the street car, but it was only for a moment, and then but a glance had been exchanged.

Captain Coldgrip's cab preserved a rapid flight until it had gone some distance; then the horses began to slacken their gait as if the detective was not very anxious to reach his destination soon.

All at once a number of loud shouts and cries were heard up the street.

The Raven opened the cab door a little and listened.

"Runaway! Clear the street thar! Pull up your horses, cabby! Jerusalem! you'll be crushed!"

These cries sent a thrill through the Raven, he threw the door wide and shouted at his driver.

"What is it?" he cried. "What kind of a runaway is that?"

"A brewery team!" said the driver wheeling his horses toward the sidewalk. "They'll catch the hack ahead—can't miss it, sir! By Jupiter! Thar she goes!"

At that moment there came a crash that drowned the cries of fifty excited people on the sidewalks.

The heavy brewery team had struck the detective's cab with all its cyclone force, and almost pulverized it!

Horses, wagon and cab were mingled in startling confusion, and the most courageous of the spectators were already on the spot.

The Raven sprung from his cab and ran forward.

The driver of the detective's vehicle was pulled from the wreck—dead!

"That's all," said a man. "Thank Heaven! the cab was empty."

"Not quite," said the Raven. "It had a passenger at the time. He's in the wreck somewhere—probably under the horses."

The crowd went to work with a will, excitedly watched by the big spy.

There was a lurking gleam of intense satisfaction in the Raven's eyes.

"He got it from an unexpected quarter, an' I didn't have to lift my hand to do him up," he said.

"Thar's no man hyer, boss," some one said as half a dozen men raised the crushed cab.

"Not there?"

Raven Rob betrayed his eagerness as he leaned forward.

"Thar's nobody hyer," was the positive rejoinder.

The Raven stared blankly at the sport where he had expected to see the dead body of the detective.

Captain Coldgrip was not in sight!

"He was in the cab just before the collision. I don't understand why he ain't here now," the Raven said.

"I kin tell yer why, mister," sung out a juvenile voice, and Raven Rob wheeled instantly upon the speaker.

"A man dropped out o' that thar cab down on the corner," continued the boy. "It happened I was lookin' that way an' saw what I did. That's why thar's no coroner's job under that bu'sted vehick."

The Raven seemed to lose his breath.

Captain Coldgrip had given him the slip for all his pains. He was ready to curse himself roundly for something he could not have avoided.

"Mebbe he knew me after all," said Raven Rob. "If he did he would be anxious to give me the slip. I've lost the game. I can go back now and wait for Foxy's report."

Deeply chagrined over the outcome of his adventure, the Raven went back to his own hired cab and gave the driver new orders.

"This is one on me, Captain Coldgrip," he laughed. "The next success belongs to Raven Rob, whose claws you shall feel before you're many hours older."

Meantime the detective had executed the movement seen by the boy.

In more ways than one it was a narrow escape, for he had not gone a block down the new street ere the runaway team crashed against the cab.

"I don't want you at my heels just now, Raven Rob," he murmured in undertones. "I will show you a startling hand in the near future, for you are in this diamond dragon game, as I well know. Foxy, your friend, met with a reverse to-night. You'll wait some time for his report, I think."

Not long afterward Captain Coldgrip rung the bell of a house that stood in the middle of a number of fine residences.

The ring was almost immediately answered, as if he had been expected, and he stepped inside.

"He is asleep in the library, sir," said the man who had admitted the detective. "He has been expecting you."

The detective passed straight to the room where he expected to find Ferguson Fowler, whose mansion he had entered.

He walked easily, although the heavy carpet under his feet gave out no sounds.

The next moment he opened the door that led into the library and entered.

A soft light pervaded the place, and at once showed Captain Coldgrip a man lying back in a heavily cushioned chair, apparently fast asleep.

Before he had advanced three steps he recognized the features of the millionaire banker, and in a moment he stood beside his chair and was looking down into his face.

Ferguson Fowler faced the elegant little table which occupied the middle of the room. His face was paler than usual—it was almost as white as his whiskers—and his heavy eyelids were closed.

Captain Coldgrip laid his hand on the banker's shoulder and shook him lightly.

The eyes did not open.

He shook him harder, but with the same result.

"Great God, this man has been drugged!" ejaculated the detective.

"More than drugged, Captain Coldgrip," said a stern voice behind him.

The detective wheeled in a flash, and saw himself covered by a man whose face was half-hidden by a dark mask.

"You have come in time to render me a little assistance," continued the masked person. "I never thought I should be obliged to you for help in a time of need. Stand where you are, captain."

The man came toward the table with his revolver still leveled at the detective's head. When he reached the table he placed upon it a small pyramidal-shaped pastille, beside which he quietly struck a match.

"You've heard of pastilles before. Ha! ha! captain!" laughed the man. "They are very powerful, sometimes. My interview with Mr. Fowler has just ended. It was too much for him, you see. I light the pastille thus, captain. Now stand still while it burns. You won't fall hard. At another time and place you may fall like a butchered bullock."

The detective fixed his eyes on the little object burning on the table.

The singular odor arising from it was filling the room and strangely affecting him.

"This is the same infamous agent that gave Ferguson Fowler four months of insanity!" he said to himself, and the next minute he sunk to the floor.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### A WOMAN OF NERVE.

"TELL me all. What was the result of your mission?—success?"

It was some time after the events just recorded, and this question was asked by an impatient and beautiful woman in another part of the city.

"Wait till I rest a moment," said the man addressed. "I had an adventure totally unlooked for. Ferg Fowler had an engagement with a certain man, but he did not come until I had played my hand. I had to deal with the visitor, also. Great Scot, woman! a dangerous man is on the trail, sure enough."

"Aha! you mean Captain Coldgrip, the detective?" exclaimed the woman, her black eyes suddenly flashing.

"Nobody else."

"And you met him at the house?"

"I did."

The face of Queen Helen grew pale; she took a quick stride toward Elegant Ahab and clutched his arm.

"There was but one thing for you to do under the circumstances," she said. "Did you do it?"

The man seemed to recoil from her look.

"No! I left him harmless for the time," he said.

"The ferret was in your power and you did not crush him! What do you mean, Ahab? I did not send you to the Fowler mansion to play a hand like this, Bowery Burt would not have played it."

"Curse Bowery Burt!" grated Elegant Ahab. "He was to decoy Captain Coldgrip into Papa Pangborn's man-traps to-night. Floss was to have been the decoy. Why didn't he keep his word? The Gotham ferret would not have invaded the Fowler house if Burt had kept his word."

"But what did you do?" asked Helen. "How far did you advance the cause of the Dragon League?"

"Not very far!" said Elegant Ahab, lighting a cigar and throwing himself into a chair with a display of ill-humor. "I found a stubborn man in the library."

"You found one there once before," responded the woman with a smile.

"Yes and the discovery cost us four months of suspense!" growled the handsome villain.

"Ferguson Fowler was not delighted to see me. I don't think he actually recognized me, but then something seemed to tell him that I was at his house for no good. I got admitted without trouble; the man we have beyond the millionaire's door understands his business."

"But he admitted Captain Coldgrip, you say?"

"A refusal to have done so would have cost him his place. That was all right. Fowler was expecting the detective, and Sleek Sam had to admit him. The banker almost sprung from his chair when he saw that I was not Captain Coldgrip. I held him down and looked him in the eye. I reckon he thought of another pastille, for he did not move, but looked at me till he grew white."

"You had him in your power then," said the woman exultingly.

"I thought I had—completely so."

"Then you failed?"

"Wait till I am through. I brought the matter up in a way that impressed him. I told him that I could lay my hand on the stolen papers and the diamond dragon. I said I was thoroughly conversant with the contents of the papers, that I knew where the real owner of the dragon was, that I could lay my hands on her in a short time, that I knew all about the ruin of the Percys, that I had tracked the criminal from the crime to his palace home—all this and more

I told him. Jupiter! I poured it into him like hot shot, and in language that cut like a kni'e."

"Well, what did he say?" asked Queen Helen, eagerly.

"He sat at the table with bloodless lips and wide eyes and said not a word."

"Thunderstruck, eh?"

"Astounded!" laughed Elegant Ahab.

"Well, you played a bold hand," the beautiful adventuress said. "You offered to return the papers and the dragon?"

"Yes."

"On the conditions I named?"

"On none other. I told him that for one million we would restore the lost articles and let him alone, that we would even point out the true heir, and let him play out any game he wants to without hinderance."

"It was heavy blackmail, Ahab; but what did he say?"

"The price seemed to take his breath."

"But you did not lower it?"

"Not a dollar! I told him that a thousand Captain Coldgrips could discover nothing, that the Dragon League was a profound and deadly mystery, and that it intended to succeed if it had to walk over his corpse with the true Percy heir. Ha, ha! wasn't that putting it pretty strong, Helen?"

"Not a whit too strong!" cried the woman.

"After all this he shook his head," continued Elegant Ahab, puffing coolly at his cigar. "I told him that we held his fortune and his life in our hands. The million was too much, I think."

"He is worth ten millions, they say, and not one is rightfully his. He intends that Nydia, his ward, shall inherit all some day, that the lost heir of the Percys shall never get a dollar of her own. We've got the call on that man, Ahab; the papers and the dragon are in our hands. This game must be played out, and before Captain Coldgrip gets fairly on the trail. You had him in your hands to-night!"

"I threw him to the floor with the fumes of the pastille. I left him there."

"With life in him to run us down!" hissed the woman. "Why didn't you finish him?"

Elegant Ahab shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah! you did not like to take life, eh, Ahab?" she cried, leaning toward him, with her hands clinched and her eyes on fire. "Don't you see what you have done? The ferret knew you!"

"I had the mask on when I confronted him."

"But he marked your stature and your voice."

"Which will do him no good. There are hundreds of men in New York like me."

"But not to that human sleuth," cried Helen. "Where are your hands, Elegant Ahab? Why didn't I go myself? I would have removed this man from our path! You hesitated; you come back here and tell me that you had Captain Coldgrip, the detective, in your hands, and yet you spared him? This will cost us trouble before the game is played out. The next play I will make myself."

She resembled a beautiful demoness as she leaned over the sport, who looked at her coolly from the depths of his chair.

"You must remember that I am the heiress," she went on. "I am the person to whom the diamond dragon belongs, the one about whom the papers speak. I am Frances Percy, though you and Bowery Burt call me Queen Helen. We are the Dragon League—we are playing for millions. The man-traps of New York are in our service. They are ready to engulf whoever we want out of our way. The oath we took was that nothing should check us—that the beauty of Nydia and the age of Ferguson Fowler should not give us a conscience. The documents and the mystic dragon, glittering with diamonds, fell into our hands. Your pastille gave him four months of insanity, but he wore the poison out. Now you go to him asking a million—only a tenth of his wealth; you leave him frightened, unconscious perhaps. Where is the money? You came away as poor as when you entered his house. You meet Captain Coldgrip, the man commissioned to ferret us out, and yet you don't kill him! What kind of a game is this you are playing? Are you afraid to shed a little blood? Do you want to desert the League? If you do, very well. I will play the game out. I and Bow'ry Burt."

Elegant Ahab changed color, and bit his lip.

"We call you Frances Percy, but you are not she, you know," he said.

"No, I am not—only during this game for gold," was the answer. "Yet, with the papers and the dragon, with what I know about the Percys, I have a winning card in my hand. The Percy heir is called dead—who can prove that I am not she?"

Helen drew back and straightened proudly before Elegant Ahab.

"I am Frances Percy for this game, and as long as I choose to be such," she went on. "The time will come when I will go back to a trail of my own. I long to hunt the villains who killed my father and threw me on the world. I will go back to that crime when I have Ferguson Fowler's millions in my hands. There is no proof that the Percy heir is dead,

but I can impersonate her without fear. What are you staring at, Elegant Ahab? Do I look like an avenger, or a seraph?"

And the woman laughed till the elegant room rung with the silvery echoes.

"I wish Bowery Burt would come," said the man.

"If he has tried to entrap the detective and failed I don't want to see him!" exclaimed Helen. "He said he could get Captain Coldgrip into Papa Pangborn's by the assistance of his girl, Floss. Who is that child?"

Elegant Ahab shook his head.

"Where did he pick her up?"

"I don't know. She was probably a street Arab."

"Is she pretty?"

"She would be if she had silks to wear!" smiled Ahab.

"I'll give her all she wants if she entraps this man-fox!" said Helen. "How old is Floss?"

"You'll have to ask Bowery Burt, and I suspect he doesn't know. By Jupiter! if you want to see this girl, I'll make it convenient."

"I don't care to. I take an interest in her because she is to help us in this play. The next throw I will make myself."

The sport's eyes suddenly dilated.

"I think I have a right to make the next play," the woman went on. "When you fail and when Bowery Burt's man-trap catches nobody, whose trail follows? I may go to the banker's palace?"

"You?"

"Helen Hotspur alias Frances Percy!" laughed the beautiful creature. "This is the deepest game ever played in New York. It is for millions! I wish Bowery Burt would come."

"He is here now," said Elegant Ahab as a door beyond the room opened and shut.

In an instant Queen Helen fastened her eyes on the entrance before her and held her breath.

The next moment it opened and Bowery Burt stepped into the room.

The Shadow was excited; his eyes glistened and his sallow hands were clinched.

"What has happened?" ejaculated the adventures, bounding forward. "For heaven's sake! open your head."

"I'll open it to recuperate," said Bowery Burt crossing the room and opening a little door in the wall. "I want a glass of liquor hotter than the waters of Tartarus. Jupiter Pluvius! we've got new foes, but one ov 'em's in a bad fix just now."

Queen Helen now uttered a startling cry and reached Bowery Burt in a single bound.

"Talk!—now!" she cried, seizing his arm.

"When I've oiled my throat," said the Shadow pouring out the liquor.

Helen stopped, biting her faultless lips and forced to wait.

"I didn't get a chance to work the trap," said Burt, turning at last upon the woman. "I had Captain Coldgrip the ferret at Papa Pangborn's door, but Floss didn't decoy him that! Great Caesar! he was decoyed by a man in woman's clothes—by a man who was pitched into the house like a sack of flour by the ferret himself. I had my hand on the rope that manipulates the trap when it took place. Floss is lost. Somebody got onto the whole game—somebody what wants the ferret out o' the way as badly as we do."

"Who can it be?" cried the woman.

"The man who was pitched into the house for me," answered Bowery Burt. "He's got one pard—nebbe more than one."

"Where is he now?"

"At Papa Pangborn's, and nearly all the time out o' his head. He calls himself Foxy sometimes, and talks about the Raven. It sticks me. After the Ferret threw Foxy into the old trap he walked away. A minute more, if he had not made his play, he would have been in the trap. Think of it! I've been lookin' for Floss, but she's not to be found. I sent her with a decoy letter to the man-fox, but the game failed."

"Ah! don't you see?" cried Helen, wheeling upon Elegant Ahab. "Captain Coldgrip went from Papa Pangborn's house to the banker's palace?"

"I see that, but who are the men working against us, and what is their scheme?"

"I'll get it out o' Foxy with Papa Pangborn's aid!" ejaculated Bowery Burt. "The man can't leave the old house till we let him out. If we say so, he will never leave it. I want to find Floss. I must find her. Foxy has spoken of her when out of his head. He knows where she is. The girl has served me well. I can't dispense with her."

"Get away from Floss for a moment," said Helen to Bowery Burt. "The man to be met now is this fox, who missed the trap to-night."

"Right you are, Helen!" exclaimed the Shadow. "If he follows up the clew which I think he got to-night, the dragon game is up."

"Then he dies!" cried the gold beauty.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### THE TRAILER AT WORK.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP did not recover from the fumes of the pastille for some time.

When he regained his senses he was lying on

the floor of Ferguson Fowler's library, and the first object that engaged his attention was the banker himself reclining in his chair, deathly pale, and apparently dead.

The faint odor of the dangerous pyramid still pervaded the room, and the detective had a slight headache.

The man with the mask, of course, was gone, and the room was silent.

Captain Coldgrip glanced at the steel safe, but it evidently had not been tampered with.

The millionaire's visitor had not come this time for a lot of papers and a diamond dragon.

The detective laid his hand on Fowler's shoulders and shook him gently.

The banker opened his eyes.

"Thank God! I see you!" he said, looking fixedly at the detective. "He is gone at last."

"Yes," said the captain. "Your visitor has taken his departure. Who was he?"

Fowler hesitated.

"Very well, just as you like," continued the detective, in an off-hand manner. "I can quit this trail very easily."

"Not for the world!—not for all my thousands!" cried Fowler, quickly. "The man who came before you is the chief of the Dragon League."

"Mortimer Nogg?"

"Yes; the same man who gave me four months of mental darkness."

"What did he want?"

"Money."

"How much?"

"One million."

"In exchange for what?"

"The papers and the dragon."

"And you refused?"

"He was exorbitant. I don't propose to be beggared."

The banker spoke firmly.

"Are the papers and the diamond dragon worth a million to you?"

"More than that."

"Oho! I see. You don't want to compromise with the League?"

"I want it broken up!" and Fowler's hand fell heavily upon the table. "I want its chief lodged in Sing Sing for theft. I want all its members in my power. I have been tracked half-around the world by the infamous gang."

"That is just what I want to talk about," said the detective, and he dropped into the chair fronting the New York nabob. "You say these people have tracked you half-around the world?"

Ferguson Fowler looked confused.

"Did I say that?" he asked.

"You said nothing else," was the answer. "You went to England during your tour?"

"Yes."

"You put up at the Albemarle Hotel, in London?"

"I did."

"You there became acquainted with a man named Major Roger Percy?"

Fowler gave a slight start.

"Well, what of it?" he asked.

"You accepted an invitation to visit Percy's estate?"

"I went to Oak Meadows with him."

"Yes," said the detective. "When was that?"

"Thirteen years ago this winter."

Captain Coldgrip looked Fowler squarely in the face while he talked.

"I don't see what all this has to do with the work I've put into your hands," Fowler went on.

"We'll come to that by and by," the city sleuth said, and then he went on:

"Three weeks after your visit to Major Percy's estate, he was found dead in his private apartments."

"That is true," said Fowler, cool and collected.

"He had no family, save a daughter, at that time—a little child called Frances, four or five years old. The coroner's jury said that the major committed suicide, I believe?"

"It was a plain case. The revolver was found in his right hand."

"So I have learned," said Captain Coldgrip.

"Several days after the—the suicide, the child and her nurse disappeared. There was no will found then. You went down to Oak Meadows and helped in the hunt for the will?"

"I did. I liked Major Percy from the first. He was an agreeable companion, but sometimes got too irritable over his wine."

Captain Coldgrip bowed.

"When the search for the will had ended, you went back to London, thence to the Continent, after seeing which you returned to America."

Ferguson Fowler looked strangely at the detective.

"You must have dogged my footsteps, captain," he smiled.

"Never mind. Two months after your return, Major Percy's will was found," the detective said. "It gave you three hundred pounds, and the rest of his fortune went to the lost child Frances, whose guardian the will made you."

"That also is correct," said Fowler; "but I don't see what all this has to do with this night's work."

A smile appeared at the corners of the detective's mouth.

" Didn't this Mortimer Nogg threaten to produce the child, Frances, if you did not yield to the Dragon League's demands?" asked Captain Coldgrip.

" He did, but it was a lame threat. The child is dead."

" How do you know that?"

The question was direct and strangely spoken. Ferguson Fowler seemed to recoil in his chair.

" I'll show you, if you must see," he said, half-between his teeth, and wheeling toward the steel safe, he opened it with an air of triumph.

The detective saw him unlock a small iron drawer beyond the inner door and take out a letter.

" Read that, sir," he said, throwing it upon the table. " If it is not proof to you, it is to me."

Captain Coldgrip picked up the letter and leaned forward. The millionaire banker eyed him like a lynx.

The letter was dated at Manchester, England, and was written in a female hand, somewhat cramped, as if the writer was not ready with the pen.

The date was a certain one, four years prior to the detective's present visit, and the letter was as follows:

" To MR. FERGUSON FOWLER,

" Banker, New York, U. S.:-

" I cannot die without telling you the awful truth. I am Mary May Cable, the nurse of Major Roger Percy's child. Three days after my unfortunate master's death, I ran off with the girl, Frances, and came to this place. My plan was to get money from you for my own use, but fear silenced me. I dared not reveal myself, and so I lived in seclusion with the girl-heiress. One year afterward, Frances Percy took sick and died. I am dying now. My last act will be to write and mail you this letter. I will accompany it with a copy of the certificate of the child's death, and with other proofs that will convince you. May you forgive, and may Heaven not punish me for what I have done."

" MARY MAY CABLE."

There was a gleam in Fowler's eyes when he saw the detective at the bottom of the letter.

" That proves all," he said. " The child is dead."

" Then, why want me to recover the papers and the diamond dragon stolen by Mortimer Nogg last November from your steel safe?"

" Because they belong to me."

Captain Coldgrip was silent for a moment.

" The child is dead, Ferguson Fowler, and yet the chief of the Dragon League threatens to produce her," the man-fox said touching the goldbug's arm as he spoke. " What does this mean?"

" He lied!—he can't produce her," was the quick response. " If he can, why come to me for a million, when, by producing the major's heir, he could rob me of ten. Don't you see through the blackmailing scheme? You are a detective; but if you can't see through this infamous plot, Captain Coldgrip, I'll get a man who can. I have employed you to find the papers and the dragon—to hunt the League down. That is your duty!"

" Very well," said the detective rising. " But what if I should run across Frances Percy? Shall I produce her, too?"

A strange ejaculation not wholly unmixed with horror burst from the banker's throat.

His look was a wild stare, and there was no blood in his face.

" What do you mean?" he cried, leaving his chair. " In God's name, Captain Coldgrip, do you pretend to believe the midnight robber's boast?"

" I merely asked you what I should do if I found Frances Percy."

" Ah! I see! You suspect that the League may have some one who is to impersonate the Percy heir when the time arrives! I do not doubt it. Mortimer Nogg's manner convinces me that such is the case. This organization is capable of doing anything. It may foist a false heir upon me; but it cannot if you do your duty. See what a trail you have before you now," continued Fowler, before the sleuth could speak. " Mortimer Nogg has been here again; you have seen him, or enough of him to give you a clew. Follow it up. Don't let them get another stroke in on me! I want the game played out, and the Dragon League crushed. If you find a Frances Percy it will be a false one, of course, the tool of this devilish League against me. Before I swooned to-night Mortimer Nogg told me that the next play would practically decide the game."

" I think it will," said the detective, significantly.

" He told me that he could put the Percy heiress in my house, that he could turn me into the street with Nydia, my beautiful ward."

" Didn't he say more than this?"

Again the banker, who had got some color, became deathly white.

" Didn't he say he could do more than turn you into the street?" pressed the detective, lowering his voice and leaning forward, his piercing eyes covering Fowler like a pair of six-shooters.

" He did, but it was a lie!" was the flashing

retort. " I can swear to you that Major Percy—"

He stopped short and waved his hand disdainfully.

" It's a lie anyhow! Why proceed to refute it?" he went on. " When you unmask this Mortimer Nogg you will find one of the deepest villains alive. He is a cool, calculating, cunning Satan. The person whom he intends to set up as Frances Percy, if I refuse to be blackmailed, is no better than he. I wish you would look out for Dado the Dwarf! I have heard of him. You picked him up in England, I believe."

" Ah, yes," said the detective. " Dado the Dwarf! I have heard of him. You picked him up in England, I believe."

" No," said the banker, starting visibly before his answer. " I ran across the fellow in Paris. He may be somewhere in New York, or, he may have gone back to his old haunts in France. I sha'n't be troubled by Mortimer Nogg any more to-night. Hereafter I will be prepared for callers of all kinds and at all hours. You will take the trail immediately, captain."

" Right away," was the response.

" Do you believe this story of the heiress being alive?"

" If she is, I'll find her," said Coldgrip, firmly.

" You read Mary May Cable's letter?"

" I did."

" The proofs she mentioned in it were stolen with the diamond dragon."

" I'll find them all."

" Do it!" and Ferguson Fowler's hand descended upon the detective's shoulder. " Find those things, break up the Dragon League, and name your pay."

The detective looked into Fowler's face for a moment and then stepped back.

" I'll go to the end of this trail if it lands the goldbug a beggar in the street," ejaculated the detective when he found himself on the street. " I'll clear up that English mystery if the law chokes somebody to death. The Dragon League is against me; so is the Raven and his thugs. Before six days expire I will have you for a foe also, Ferg Fowler. That letter from Manchester is a falsehood. I'll prove it such during this game for gold."

" I hope you will, Captain Coldgrip," said a voice behind him. " But look out for the traps of the rival leagues."

The detective wheeled in a second and looked for the speaker, but nobody was in sight save the figure of the man he had just left beyond the library windows.

Ferguson Fowler was watching him from the house.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE RAVEN'S BEAK.

BOWERY BURT was bent on finding Floss.

" Why does he cling so to that girl?" Queen Helen asked Elegant Ahab who was coolly smoking in the well furnished parlor of the house on Canal street.

" She's valuable to him, does the decoy business when he wants anything of that kind done," said the handsome villain between his puffs.

" I don't see how the man called Foxy, whoever he is, took Floss's place and decoyed Captain Coldgrip to the door of Papa Pangborn's."

" It is plain to me," said Ahab.

" Floss turned the job over to him."

Helen Hotspur smiled.

" Do you believe that Floss has Foxy for a lover?" she asked.

" It looks that way. The girl leaves Bowery Burt with a decoy message for Captain Coldgrip; she disappears; a man dressed in woman's clothes—a sleek fad called Foxy—takes up the job and decoys the ferret to the door of the very house which we wanted him to reach. There's the whole thing in a nutshell, Helen. How does it look to you?"

Elegant Ahab leaned back in his chair and looked up into the beauty's face.

" Then Floss can't be relied on to play Bowery Burt's games hereafter," she said.

" I would think not."

" If he discovers this—what?"

" He will give Floss a shaking up that'll last her a generation," grinned Ahab. " She has not returned home. Foxy has her under his thumb."

" But he is in Papa Pangborn's place and consequently in Burt's power. Our ally says he will choke certain things out of Foxy."

" If he can!" laughed Elegant Ahab.

" Men like Foxy aren't very easily choked, or, if choked, they don't surrender readily. It seems, so Burt says, that Captain Coldgrip read a letter almost in front of Papa Pangborn's. That letter unmasked Foxy."

" Do you think so?" cried Helen.

" What else did it?" exclaimed Ahab. " From his station in the house Burt saw the letter read; he says he noticed the look the man-fox gave the false girl immediately after. For all that, he let Foxy lead him to the door and then he threw him inside like a cannon ball."

The woman was silent for a moment, but her eyes gleamed and her hands closed tightly.

" Who gave the scheme away, think you?" she cried.

" Hang me if I know. Captain Coldgrip must have been warned on the street."

" But by whom?"

" By some one who doesn't want the Dragon League to succeed," answered Ahab with a smile.

" Let me find the enemy!" cried the woman. " Show me the person who warned Captain Coldgrip, and I promise you that he, or she, shall leave the game!"

" By Jupiter! I believe you! I never want you against me," said Ahab. " If Bowery Burt finds Floss, there will be a full explanation or a punishment. But the League must not remain idle."

" Not for a moment! You left Captain Coldgrip alive though unconscious on the floor of Ferg Fowler's library. When he awoke he undoubtedly went for the banker."

" And learned what?" laughed Elegant Ahab.

" That Mortimer Nogg wanted a million dollars for a few papers and the diamond dragon. Mortimer Nogg is Mortimer Nogg to Fowler only. Outside of this house the name is lost—it gives Captain Coldgrip no clew. Elsewhere I am Elegant Ahab or half a dozen other gentlemen; when I call on Ferg Fowler I am Mortimer Nogg. Ah! you see, Helen. By Jove! I must go out now. Bowery Burt has doubtless gone to Papa Pangborn's to pump Foxy by fair means or foul. He wants Floss."

" If you see him tell him that he must not lose sight of our quarry," exclaimed Helen.

" That I will. Because I let Captain Coldgrip off with his life at Ferg Fowler's mansion, it is no sign that he escapes the next time. Good-night, Helen. The game is fairly afoot now!" And with the trumpet laugh that followed the last sentence Elegant Ahab vanished and Helen Hotspur was alone.

" I wonder if I'm equal to the emergency?" said the voice of a man who saw Ahab leave the house and walk rapidly away. " I've played some almighty cool games in my time an' ag'in' some desperately cool people. I'll let Elegant Ahab go. He's likely to remain away some time. If I had Foxy here with his cunning we'd make a swoop in concert, but he hasn't turned up since I saw him towing Captain Coldgrip toward the old Jew's man-trap; so I'll have to operate this scheme myself. Now I'll astonish somebody."

The man was our old acquaintance, Raven Rob, Foxy's pard and fellow-plotter.

He walked straight to the house just left by Elegant Ahab, jerked the bell quickly, and awaited results with a cunning smile at the corners of his mouth.

The Raven was a giant in stature, and his deep-set eyes of midnight darkness told that he was a hard man to handle when he wanted to prove stubborn.

" Mebbe this door doesn't open to anybody but to Elegant Ahab and Bowery Burt," mused Raven Rob while he waited. " I'm at the right house, and the beauty of the League must be at home. Hello! here we come at last!"

The next moment a catch-bolt was drawn by somebody on the inside, and the door opened a little!

Raven Rob caught a glimpse of a woman's face.

" You want to see me," he said. " I am here on a special errand concerning the business Ahab has in hand."

" Didn't you just meet him?" asked Helen.

" Bless me if I did! But you can take the message; it's very important."

" Let me have it, then," said the woman, extending her hand.

" It's too important to deliver hyer," replied the Raven. " However, if you don't want it, I'll go."

" Come in," and Helen opened the door wider, displaying her figure and the dimly-lighted hall to the man.

Raven Rob stepped inside, and the door clicked behind him.

Helen, with a glance at him, led the way to the room at the right of the hall, and a moment later Raven Rob wheeled suddenly upon her.

" You are Helen Hotspur?" he said.

The beautiful creature flushed, probably at the abruptness of the question.

" I am Miss Helen," she said.

" Oh, yes—Miss Helen Hotspur!" was the retort, accompanied by the semblance of a coarse laugh. " Well, I am Robert Randolph, though I don't use my name at that length very often. You are the person I want to see."

" Then you have no message for Ahab?"

The woman's look was full of indignation.

" Not much of a one!" laughed the Raven.

" It was a device to get in here!" said Helen, glancing toward the door.

" Pretty much that way."

Helen drew back a step, and looked at this cool man.

She knew that his coming meant no good for the cause she had espoused, and she resolved resolutely to give no secrets away.

Raven Rob in the light looked like a handsome villain quite capable of contending with Elegant Ahab in strength.

His clothes were not cut with that nicety which distinguished those worn by the head of

the Dragon League; there was more of the roughness about Raven Rob, but for all this he was a big, good-looking city cool-blade.

Helen tried to read his mission in his eyes while he confronted her.

As he had forced his way into her presence by a subterfuge, she could readily believe he was there for no good.

What should she say to him? Should she open the ball?

"My lovely creature, I am hyer on business of importance," suddenly ejaculated the Raven.

"Well, Ahab is not in."

"Ahab be hanged!" was the quick retort. "I want to see *you*, and I am enjoying that pleasure just now. I am sorry I have to trouble you, but I want the papers."

Helen's face grew white that instant.

"What papers?" she exclaimed, recoiling a step.

"The Percy documents!" said the Raven, following her up. "If you people of the Dragon League think you can play the best game, go ahead. I am hyer for them papers. I'll take them first."

"And what afterward?" asked Helen.

"The diamond dragon!"

The Queen of the League did not cry out at this announcement, but stood like a statue before the Raven and gave him a stony stare.

"Does your eyes say 'no'?" ejaculated Raven Rob. "Sha'n't I have what I've come for?"

"They are not here," said Helen.

"Not hyer, eh? Do you think I expect Elegant Ahab to carry 'em on his person? Not much I don't, my dragon guardian. Come! there can be no compromise between us. I am hyer for the papers and the dragon in its little box of iron. Hand 'em over!"

But Helen did not move.

"Must I hunt 'em myself?" continued Raven Rob suddenly, throwing up his big hands which were formidable enough to drive a shudder through the woman.

"I tell you they are not here; and, besides, you are nothing less than a robber!" cried Helen.

"That's just what I am!" laughed the Raven, showing his teeth below his glowing eyes. "I am just what Elegant Ahab was the night he went to Ferg Fowler's house last November—a midnight robber. I want the papers and the diamond dragon, and I want 'em almighty quick, too. Don't tell me they're not hyer! By Jove, my city seraph, if you force me to hunt 'em you'll have to clean up after a tornado. Hand 'em over!"

Although Helen was of good figure, the giant towered above her like a mountain.

His eyes were darting fire, and his fingers moved nervously, as if eager to do violence.

All at once his hands sprung forward and caught the woman who faced him.

"Shall I hunt 'em myself?" he cried.

Queen Helen's teeth met with firmness.

"Yes, thief," she sent into his face.

In an instant his hands were transferred to her shapely throat, and they tightened there, while she gave him a glare of defiance.

The next second was one of intense pain to the Queen of the Dragon League.

In the grip of the Raven she could offer no resistance, and although she clutched his arms in her struggles, she could not loosen his grasp.

"I guess she'll know when she comes to that I'm not to be fooled with!" said Raven Rob, as he turned from the unconscious woman on the sofa in the lamplight. "I'll now hunt the articles up, and with them we'll play a hand that'll make us Wall street kings."

He began to search the room in which he had overcome the Dragon League Queen.

Nothing escaped his eyes or hands.

He picked the lock of the elegant writing-desk and searched it thoroughly.

From that room he went into another and subjected it to the same scrutiny.

Dressing-stands, bureaus, and wardrobes were turded inside out, as it were, but without results.

The track of the cool blade looked like the track of a storm. He sounded the floor, looked behind the pictures, and examined the walls for secret compartments.

His eyes fairly blazed with disappointment when he came back to the parlor and threw a mad look at the still unconscious Helen.

"She knows, but she can't tell just now," he said. "By Jupiter! I'd like to choke the secret out o' you, Queen Helen! The next hunt won't fail. To-night only begins the Raven's game! This is cyclone number one, my sleepin' seraph. Thar ar' ten millions at stake, an' I've sworn ter win—I an' Foxy. Good-night, my choked viper. You will curse me to my boots when you look at the ravage I've left behind. Ta-ta, Miss Helen Hotspur. When are you going to appear in the game as the true Percy heir?"

The laugh of the Raven, brutal and coarse, died away in the hall, the door opened and closed, and the city thug was on the street again.

"Not this time, but the next—bet your life!" he exclaimed.

Some time after his departure Queen Helen moved, opened her eyes, and then got up.

"Great God! did the man succeed?" she exclaimed.

She walked unsteadily across the room and out into the hall.

She was gone five minutes, and when she re-entered the parlor there was a flash of victory in her eyes.

"I have them yet!" she cried. "No living man can beat the Dragon League!"

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### THE DETECTIVE AND THE DEATH-TRAP.

"THE first knot to untie is the one about the decoy to Papa Pangborn's," mentally ejaculated Captain Coldgrip as he found himself within sight of the old house occupied by the Jew. "I threw him into the house with force sufficient to give him a life-long remembrance of the event. I shall investigate this matter for myself," and a moment later he stood in front of the house.

The hour was late, and the street was strangely quiet.

Captain Coldgrip argued mentally that he would probably find Papa Pangborn alone.

Detective as he was, he was not ready to pronounce the old Jew a double-dealer with him, although he would not have given him a certificate of entire honesty. On several occasions Papa Pangborn had put the city sleuth onto some important clews; but the detective could say that he had always paid the old fellow well for such services.

The question now was, did the Jew know that Captain Coldgrip was to be decoyed to his establishment for dark purposes? If he did, then, was he in any way connected with the deep work of the Dragon League?

It was eleven o'clock or past when Captain Coldgrip rung the private bell attached to Papa Pangborn's front door.

He heard no tinkle beyond the portal as on ordinary occasions, for the little bell attached to the end of the wire was in the Jew's private apartments.

After a while there was a noise of feet in the corridor, and a slide opened in the door itself. Beyond the little opening the detective saw a pair of glittering eyes.

An exclamation greeted the New York ferret, and when the eyes disappeared a lock clicked and the door opened.

"A little late, papa, but always on hand," remarked Coldgrip.

A single gas jet was burning in the hall, but it furnished light enough to show the detective that for once he was not a welcome visitor to the old Jew's trap. Papa Pangborn would sooner have opened his door to some one else at that hour, but he seemed to feel that it would not be policy to keep Claude Coldgrip out.

"I was here earlier in the night. Ah! you remember!" said the man sleuth, watching Papa Pangborn intently.

"Ven vas it, my frient?" asked the old Jew with brazen impudence.

"When I threw the man called Foxy inside," was the answer. "Come! Please don't lower my established good opinion of you, Papa. I heard you at the door when Foxy performed his acrobatic feat. Did I hurt the rascal much?"

"He was pretty near killed," said Papa Pangborn betraying his duplicity.

"Ah! I thought so. I did not take care that he should fall softly," laughed the captain. "You've formed a new partnership, I see."

The Jew's eyes dilated and he seemed to recoil.

"Holy Moses, captain! I vas innocent of it all. Dot man never come to me till you throw him in at dot door."

"Where is he?"

The question asked without warning and with sternness, made Papa Pangborn throw a lightning glance down the hall.

"Vat I vants him in my house for, hey?" suddenly cried the Jew. "I send for der batrol wagon—"

"Excuse me, Papa; you sent for nothing of the kind," interrupted Captain Coldgrip. "I don't want any double dealing here. If you are bound to destroy my good opinion of you, you will keep on. The man thrown into your house is here yet. I want to see him."

The detective took a sudden step toward the old man as he uttered the last sentence, and dropped a hand on one of his shoulders.

"Show me Foxy with no more preliminaries!" he said coolly. "I am now following my profession in dead earnest; there is a gigantic game on hand and if you are found to be connected with it, you may not fare well."

"Joseph's goat! I swear, captain—"

"Postpone your oaths!" smiled the detective. "We'll need them in a court of law by and by perhaps. Now, come along, Papa. Is the man up-stairs or down?"

The eyes of the Jew sunk back into his head, and while he glared at Captain Coldgrip, his skinny hands clinched. For a moment the detective was in danger of an assault by the old tiger, but he cooled down and led the way down the hall.

He opened a door at the end of it and conducted the city trailer into a small room dimly lit by a gas-jet, then the two passed through that to a closet-like place, where they found a flight of steps.

"Aha! Foxy is somewhere in the basement!"

said Captain Coldgrip to himself. "This gives me a new insight into Papa Pangborn's character. And at Foxy's expense, too!"

During the journey through the last room, the old Jew had found and lighted a candle, and its feeble rays dissipated the gloom that was thick in the chamber at the foot of the stair.

The room was not floored, but the ground was almost as hard as cement, and the detective saw the cob-webbed rafters overhead.

"Is the man dead that you should fetch him here?" asked Captain Coldgrip.

Papa Pangborn made no reply, but led the sleuth to one of the corners of the place, and pointed toward the ground.

The candle held down at the same time revealed a low cot, with the figure of a man upon it.

The position of the person struck the detective at first glance.

The face, which was very dark, was partly hidden by the scanty bed-clothes, the knees were drawn up to the chin, and the hands clutched the threadbare cover.

A wild thought flashed through Captain Coldgrip's brain.

"That man is dead!" he exclaimed.

The old Jew uttered a cry of startling horror, and the feeble candle almost fell from his hands.

"Dead! For der love of Abraham, no!" he cried.

"Look at him!" said Captain Coldgrip, snatching the light away and holding it close to the object on the cot. "This man has gone to judgment!"

Papa Pangborn came forward with reluctance, his eyes large and wonderstruck, ready to escape from their sockets.

"Is this Foxy?" asked the detective.

The old Jew nodded.

"Somebody has been here since he was placed on this cot," continued the captain. "Did you ever see the corpse of a man who was choked to death?"

"Shoked? My God! Captain Coldgrip! was this man killed in dot vay?" gasped Papa Pangborn.

"He died by violence—strangled by somebody!" was the answer. "The body is not altogether cold, but life is gone just the same."

The Israelite looked in silence at the dead, and the man-hunter watched him furtively.

He saw that his discovery was a surprise to Papa Pangborn. The old fellow expected to show him Foxy alive on the cot, but here the decoy was dead—strangled by the hand of some one.

"Was Foxy playing against me with your consent to-night?" suddenly asked the detective.

Papa Pangborn solemnly raised his hand.

"Before heaven, he vas not!" he said.

"Where is the real criminal? I mean, who has had access to this place besides yourself?"

The Jew hesitated.

"Very well, keep your mouth closed," said the detective. "The case is this. A man comes to Papa Pangborn's house; he is slightly confused when found by the owner; he is taken to the basement and strangled there. His body is warm when found by Claude Coldgrip. Papa Pangborn has access to the cellar at all hours. He pretends ignorance of the crime. What do you think the verdict will be, my old fellow?"

The countenance of the Jew was a sight to behold when Captain Coldgrip got to his last sentence.

It was one almost bloodless, and written all over with terror.

"Ah! you anticipated the verdict, I see!" laughed the sleuth of the law. "There are two paths before you, Papa Pangborn. Take your choice."

The old Jew leaned against the stone wall of the cellar and trembled.

He looked once at the corpse of the cot and then into the detective's face until his gaze became a stare.

"I can't stay here all night," said Captain Coldgrip. "As you keep silent, I presume you court an investigation. Very well. It may throw some light on the murder of this man in Papa Pangborn's house. Come, we'll go upstairs. Foxy will be taken away by the proper authorities."

Papa Pangborn gave utterance to a strange cry as the detective moved away.

"Hear me!" he gasped. "Dot oder man vat could come here if he would, is gone."

"What man?"

"Bowery Burt."

"Aha!" said the captain. "He knew the way down here, did he?"

"Yes."

"And he knew, too, that this man Foxy was here?"

Papa Pangborn slightly inclined his head.

"We'll go up now," continued the detective.

"I begin to see that this piece of work is not yours, though done on your premises. The handiwork of Bowery Burt is apparent since you have spoken his name."

The white-faced Jew seemed anxious to quit the place where Foxy, the decoy and Raven Rob's chum, lay dead in the damp corner.

He led Captain Coldgrip from the cellar and up to the main floor of the house.

A dozen times his eyes sparkled like the eyes of a serpent about to dart at its tormentor.

"When did Bowery Burt quit the house?" asked the detective.

"I don't know."

"Shortly after he finished Foxy, no doubt."

There was no reply.

"Are you certain he has left the house, Papa?"

"He is gone," said the old Jew, positively.

"What was Foxy to him? You know, and I want the truth. Bowery Burt doesn't strangle a man for nothing. He went to the cellar for a certain purpose, if not a deadly one. He committed murder there. Was he trying to choke a secret of some kind out of Foxy? Was he mad because he failed to toll me into your house? What was it, Papa Pangborn?"

The two men stood once more in the corridor that led to the street door.

"This looks to me like a part of the diamond dragon game," Captain Coldgrip went on to the speechless Jew.

"That is just what it is, Captain Coldgrip!" said a voice which seemed to come down from the darkened ceiling.

Detective and Jew started back and looked up.

"My God! it was a ghost, dot vos!" ejaculated Papa Pangborn, and before the city sleuth could detain him he sprung back and was more than ten feet away.

The next moment there came a grating noise, and then a sudden snapping as if of a number of boards.

Captain Coldgrip seemed thrown from his balance; the floor of the hallway was breaking up under his feet.

With agility inspired by the terrible situation he leaped toward the door.

"Great Scot! this is a veritable man-trap!" passed through his brain.

The whole floor beneath him gave way as his hands caught the knob.

At that moment the gas was turned out!

The New York sleuth, hanging along the door, felt nothing under his feet.

"He was gone!—gone!" he heard Papa Pangborn say in the darkness behind him.

"Not by a thousand miles, my old tramp," muttered the detective. "This is the closest call of my life, but the hand is yours yet if you play it well. Aha! the floor is coming back!"

The next moment, with a number of singular noises, that portion of the floor which had given way beneath the man-ferret's feet resumed its old position.

His feet touched it with delight, and his hand caught the key in the lock.

The next moment he gave it a sudden wrench, threw wide the door, and bounded into the street.

"The trap worked, but the rat is free!" he laughed aloud.

## CHAPTER XII.

### WANTED FOR MURDER.

Yes, the rat was free!

If Captain Coldgrip could have looked beyond the closed door of Papa Pangborn's house, he would have seen a man appear suddenly at the old Jew's side, and two hands clutch the venerable rascal's arms.

"What did that mean?" cried this man. "You told me that the city ferret was gone, but somebody went out when the floor came back. It must have been Claude Coldgrip, and yet the trap was fairly sprung under his feet."

Papa Pangborn's reply to these words was a wild stare. He seemed ready to sink to the floor with fright.

What! Captain Coldgrip gone, with a knowledge of the dead man in the cellar, and knowing that the house was provided with a death-trap?

The thought overwhelmed the Jew.

The man who confronted him left him long enough to turn the gas on, and then he pointed to the empty corners near the door.

Papa Pangborn stared at him, but said nothing.

"I would have sprung the trap on him before you took him into the basement if you had not been in the way," the man continued. "I would have caught him then without fail. Now the man is at large. But what did he find in the cellar?"

"Dot man we took thar," said the Jew. "Bowery Burt, vat you do dot for?"

"Do what?" asked the Jew's confronter, who was Bowery Burt the Shadow.

"What you choke dot man a leetle too hard for?"

"Is he still unconscious?"

"Dot man is dead!"

Bowery Burt gave a slight start.

Papa Pangborn affirmed, in language not to be misunderstood, that the occupant of the cot in the dark was really dead.

"Then Captain Coldgrip got nothing out of him!" laughed the Shadow.

"Vat you got, eh?" asked Papa Pangborn.

"But precious little that was satisfactory. I wanted him to give me a pointer as to Floss's whereabouts. I did everything I could to get the information. He wandered in his head at times, and when he was right, curse him! he

wasn't accommodating with his tongue. I didn't mean to choke him that hard, Papa; but it can't be helped now, I reckon. Why didn't he put me on Floss's trail? He would be breathin' now if he had played fair."

It was evident to the Jew that Bowery Burt was not very sorry for what his mad hands had done.

He was a man without a conscience, and was ready to take human life if it stood in his path.

"Dot man vill come pack. Mine God! vat I vant to go before der courts for, eh?" ejaculated Papa Pangborn turning white again.

"You don't have to stay here," said Burt. "You have another house in the city, and Captain Coldgrip doesn't know where it is."

The Jew's eyes got a new sparkle.

"Let them find Foxy in the cellar," the Shadow went on. "Captain Coldgrip is playing a game just now which he doesn't want interfered with by the authorities. I believe you would be safe in staying here. Give Foxy a grave where he is. There will be no raid on this house—my word for that. The Mulberry street ferret will keep his own counsel and work at the case in hand after his own manner. We must circumvent him yet. By heavens! he shall not beat all of us. There's too much at stake for that!"

"Foxy told you noddings at all about der girl, hey?" asked the Jew, his thoughts as they often did, going back to Floss, the decoy.

"Almighty little—only enough to tell me that he took her message from her and used it himself in decoying Captain Coldgrip. Floss is detained somewhere. She would have come back to the nest if it was not so. I've got to find that girl."

"Vat makes her so important, Bowery Burt?"

"She is helpful to me," said the Shadow quickly. "I can't afford to spare her. She has made me thousands by her shrewdness in playing the cards I put into her hands. She would have insured us the biggest stake yet played for if she had succeeded this time."

"Then she knows—"

"Yes, she knows that we are playing for millions. She knows that we are in a fair way of getting our fingers on the chink in Ferg Fowler's coffers. I must find that girl, I say!"

Bowery Burt pulled his hat over his eyes, drew up his heavy coat and collar and walked toward the door.

"Go out der bivate vay," said Papa Pangborn tugging suddenly at his sleeves. "Mine heavens! if dot man Captain Coldgrip should be watchin' out dare."

"A good suggestion, Papa," laughed Bowery Burt. "The rat who eluded the trap may be watching the door."

The Shadow turned and left the house by a secret entrance and when he appeared on the street again it was a square from the trap.

"The only man who ever beat that trap!" he ejaculated as his thoughts went back to the man whose miraculous escape had not ceased to surprise him. "It wouldn't have been a bad idea to have jerked the cord when Papa Pangborn was at his side. The old Jew may give us trouble in the future. If I had the job to do over, hang me, if I wouldn't have sprung the trap two minutes sooner!"

Bowery Burt did not go to the house on Canal street to report the detective's escape, but turned his steps toward that quarter of the city where he lived. Perhaps Floss had come home. He was eager to see for himself, so, when he reached the building he rushed up-stairs and sprung into the little room from which he had sent the girl on her errand to decoy the detective to his doom.

Floss did not greet him.

"Mebbe she came back an' wentaway again," he said. "I'll run up an' ask the sick man in the room overhead."

For some days the room above Bowery Burt's abode had been occupied by a man compelled to keep his bed. At first the Shadow was compelled to view this person with suspicion, and forbade Floss to visit him, as he was young and good looking; but the girl had overcome these suspicions, and had become acquainted with the sick man.

Bowery Burt did not knock at the door above, but pushed it open and entered the room.

Darkness met him.

"Hello! Mowbray?" he called, leaning forward in the gloom.

There was no answer, and Bowery Burt repeated the name in a louder tone.

Continued silence was the sole reply.

Muttering an oath, the Shadow struck a match and crossed the room.

The outlines of the bed soon became visible, and then he discovered that the sick man was gone.

"Yesterday he was delirious and weaker nor a cat: now he isn't in sight!" ejaculated Bowery Burt.

All at once his old suspicions came back.

"I'll go bail, if this doesn't look bad!" he exclaimed. "I never liked Drake Mowbray's look, and I used to tell Floss so. I wonder if he could look into our room, anyhow? If he could, that settles a good deal."

Bowery Burt turned on the gas and began to

lift the carpet that covered the floor. His eyes had the glitter of a lynx's when on the trail, and nothing escaped them.

Suddenly he uttered a loud cry.

"The man was a fraud—a spy!" he exclaimed. "By this hole in the floor he could see and hear everything! He must have heard me send Floss out on the last mission. Somebody warned Captain Coldgrip when almost in my clutches at Papa Pangborn's. Was it this Drake Mowbray? I'd give half of my share of the dragon fortune to have my hand at his throat this minute. By Jupiter! I would leave him as I left Foxy!"

Bowery Burt left the room in a state of confusion, and rushed back to his own quarters.

"Things ar' gettin' interestin'!" he exclaimed. "What would Elegant Ahab and Queen Helen say if I war to unburden myself at this supreme moment? They would think for a minute that the dragon stakes had gone glimmerin'. Foxy gave me such a slight clew to Floss that it's hardly worth followin'. He talked once or twice about the Raven, an' about the last thing he said when he war tryin' to push my hands from his throat war to connect Floss with the Raven, whoever he is."

Bowery Burt threw himself into a chair, put his feet upon a table and lit a pipe. It was past midnight, and the dying fire in the grate was leaving the room cold again.

"Can't I fix this Raven in my head, somehow?" he murmured. "I war raised in New York an' ought to know 'em all. Of course he's got a decent name, but the Raven's all I've got to go by. It might be a dandy clew to the secret police; but it's all Greek to me."

The Shadow racked his brain as he had never racked it before.

He chewed the stem of his pipe in his vexation and rage, and let it go out a dozen times.

"I can't play the *reserve* game without Floss!" he cried. "By Jerusalem Josh! the biggest card fell from my hand when the girl disappeared. I had a lay-out superior to the one Elegant Ahab and Helen have set up on Ferg Fowler. But without Floss, what is it worth to me? Nothing, by Jehu! not a dime!"

Bowery Burt sat still a few moments longer and then threw his pipe away with a sudden exclamation.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he said. "If it is still there, it may help the case of Drake Mowbray; if it is gone, it will show that he has been here."

He went to one of the side walls and removed a poor print in a dirty frame.

Then he put his hand up to a spot covered by the picture, and found a secret spring. A little door opened.

"It is here any way!" said Burt, putting his hand into the opening thus revealed and feeling a paper. "This secret place escaped the eye of the spy on the floor above. With this and Floss I can bring the victors to terms. Why, I can add two shares to the one I am to get! But two things must happen first. I must find Floss and Captain Coldgrip must leave the trail forever!"

He shut the opening in the wall, rehung the picture, and walked away.

"I must find who the Raven is," he continued.

"The girl is where he and Foxy left her. Does the Raven suspect?—Does he know that Floss may be worth her weight in diamonds? Jehu! what a game this is!"

The next moment Bowery Burt was preparing for another raid into the night. A perfect night-hawk, he knew the streets of New York thoroughly.

Darkness was daylight to him.

He had a game to play that was worth the playing.

He was a member of the Dragon League of three, but that did not prevent him from getting a hand of his own.

If he had known that Queen Helen had lately been visited by the Raven—the very man he wanted to find—he would have gone straight to the house on Canal street for a description of the cool robber.

But this was an event yet to be known to Bowery Burt.

He was about to quit the room for a trail in the cold hours of midnight when a footprint in the narrow hall beyond the door arrested his attention.

"Who's out thar?" growled Bowery Burt, taking a step forward.

"Nobody wants to molest me just now. I'll show my teeth if they do."

A moment later the knob turned—the door was not locked—and the Shadow drew back to see who would enter.

In a second Bowery Burt found himself confronted by a tall man in a dark uniform.

The Shadow instinctively recoiled.

"I want you," said the officer advancing.

"Me? And for what?"

"On a charge of murder!"

Bowery Burt's eyes got a flash; he seemed to gather strength, like a tiger about to spring.

"Who am I charged with killing?" he asked in a voice unlike his own.

"A man named Foxy Funk and at Papa Pangborn's. The Jew himself is the accuser."

A loud oath leaped from the Shadow's throat. "The old sheeny is lying to save his own neck!" he cried, and then he sprung at the officer, hurled him like a child against the wall, and disappeared like an arrow!

## CHAPTER XIII.

## FOXY'S OLD PARD SURPRISED.

THE reader has not forgotten the cool character whose visit to Queen Helen was somewhat cyclonic in its nature.

We go back to him—to Raven Rob, whom we saw last walking disappointed from the haunts of the Dragon League.

The man went straight to his old quarters, anxious to greet Foxy and to hear the story of his failure to decoy Captain Coldgrip into Papa Pangborn's place.

But, as we know, Foxy was not there to greet him, and, with a curse for his pard's "tardiness," the Raven went into another part of the house and unlocked a door.

Opening the door quickly he stepped into a small room and found himself face to face with a beautiful young girl about seventeen, and well clad.

"You have come at last!" were the words with which Raven Rob was greeted.

"I get in a little late sometimes, but I never fail," he said, eying the girl sharply.

"I am to go forth now, ain't I?"

"Not just yet. You are the bird in the cage," and the rascal laughed derisively.

"A prisoner?" cried the girl. "Why am I detained?"

"Policy, my child, policy," said the Raven, and then he stepped closer and suddenly seized the girl's wrist.

"He calls you Floss," he continued, looking down into her eyes. "Is that your name?"

"It must be," was the answer. "I never knew any other."

"When did you first know Bowery Burt?"

"All my life."

"In this city?"

"Yes."

"Floss, eh? Floss!" ejaculated the villain. "Only Floss on your word, girl?"

"Nothing more than that."

He did not drop her hand, but continued to eye her steadily.

"You will play fairer with me now than you did when Foxy captured you with the decoy message for Captain Coldgrip," he went on.

"We are alone here, Floss. Bowery Burt wrote that message, didn't he?"

Floss glued her elegant lips together, gave the Raven a defiant look, but did not speak.

"Silence will do you no good," Raven Rob said. "If you don't want to talk about the decoy message we'll talk a little. Did Bowery Burt ever talk about the game the man-ferret wants to spoil?"

"What game is that?"

"The scheme against Ferg Fowler, the millionaire, to be plain," was the reply.

"He generally keeps his secrets," Floss answered.

"But this one he talked about, eh?"

"What if he did?"

"It amounts to something to me, Floss, and to you. What if I could lift you out of poverty and put you on a mountain of gold?"

The girl laughed.

"Oh," said the Raven, "I kin make it a reality if you will help me."

"You want me to desert Bowery Burt?"

"Yes."

"He has clothed and fed me all my life."

"But what is he? A man who never earned an honest penny at any time; a city thug; a man with hands red—"

"Are you any better?" suddenly interrupted the girl.

"I play higher games!" said the Raven, drawing his figure up with a show of pride. "Foxy an' I deal cleaner cards than Bowery Burt does. We don't have to be the shadow of a man like Elegant Ahab; we never play the role of hired assassin."

"No," said Floss, her eyes suddenly catching fire as she recoiled from the man before her.

"No, of course not, Raven Rob! But it is only because nobody will hire you. Oh, you are all alike. I have been forced to see men of your kind all my life. Bowery Burt and you are two birds of one feather; Foxy is the third. I know you like a familiar book. Yes, you play high games, as you call them, but the stakes are all the same—gold!"

The Raven darted toward Floss with a wild, insulting laugh.

"You kin bet your holy existence it is!" he cried, clutching her arm again before she could get beyond his reach. "You don't want to help my game at all, but you are perfectly willing to play Bowery Burt's out."

"It is not true! I have longed for liberty. I want to get beyond the influence I have been forced to keep in for years. You dare not show me the way, Raven Rob. Threats have bound me to Bowery Burt. The man is not my father; he has told me this much."

"Nothing else, girl?"

"He told me a good deal of stuff which I did not believe."

"About what?"

"About getting out of Chatham street into a home on the avenue."

"You didn't take it in, hey?"

"No; who should I?"

"That is so," said the Raven, guardedly.

"So you won't help me with my game?"

"I don't want to. I want to get out of this house, though."

"Whar would ye go?"

The girl hesitated.

"Back to Bowery Burt's to give me away, eh?" said Raven Rob with a leer.

"I don't want to go back to him," said Floss.

"No! you want to run things on your own hook. Now, listen to me for a moment."

Raven Rob drew back and glanced at the window behind Floss before he continued.

"A good many years ago a man killed himself at his country seat near London, England," he resumed, "that is, the coroner said it was suicide. He had one child at the time; he was a widower and quite wealthy. The last friend he made was an American—a man tolerably well-fixed, a keen fellow, withal, with an eye single to the almighty dollar. The two became great friends; the American went down to the Englishman's country-seat and the pair had high times there."

"This sort o' thing went on for weeks. Some times the Britisher got the worse for wine, and the American would go back to London till he straightened up. The *suicide* happened one night, and was not discovered till late the next day. It made talk, but it soon died away, although the Englishman was a man of wealth an' considerable prominence. The American was horrified to learn of the *suicide* of his friend. He posted down to the country-seat without delay, and helped to ransack the mansion for the Englishman's will. It wasn't found till long afterward, and then by a dwarf who professed to have dreamed out the hiding-place!"

"Well, that will make the American richer than he was before. It also gave him the guardianship of the Englishman's little child, who had disappeared mysteriously with her nurse. Now, Floss, as they call you, did you ever hear anybody talk about these things?"

The girl saw intense eagerness and excitement in the Raven's eyes.

He leaned forward despite his efforts to stand erect.

"Bowery Burt told me that story once," said Floss.

"Ah!" exclaimed Raven Rob. "So the Shadow knew, did he?"

"Yes; he left out one thing that you mentioned."

"What was that?"

"He did not say that the will was found by a dwarf."

"Well, it was, and by a dwarf who has since been called Duke Dado by a certain person. Did Bowery Burt ever intimate that the rich Englishman did not take his own life?"

"Not to me," said Floss promptly.

"Well he did not. Major Roger Percy was murdered!"

The announcement came so suddenly and with such emphasis, that the girl uttered a slight cry and started back.

But the next moment a smile appeared at her lips.

"What is all this to me?" she asked herself.

"Why does this man, called the Raven, tell me this story of a crime committed across the sea?"

"Yes, that man was murdered!" repeated Raven Rob.

"Who did it?"

Floss asked the question almost unconsciously. It bubbled to her lips without the slightest effort on her part.

"Ah! we'll get at that by and by, my girl!" laughed the Raven. "That is a part of the game being played just now. There are two men living who can answer positively the question: 'Who killed Roger Percy?'

"Are you one of them?"

"I am not, but before long I will lay my hand on one of the two."

"And hand the murderer over to justice?" asked Floss.

"That depends," said Raven Rob with a singular smile. "What do I care, here in the United States, whether anybody hangs for that English crime or not? I'm on the make—I am, my Chatham street seraph. I want my share of the stakes being fought for by the Dragon League just now. I want to put my hands on a certain swag which I know was taken from a certain house in this city last November. I made a play for 'em to-night, but lost the game. I can't make myself solid without 'em. You were doing me a good turn when you were going to tell Captain Coldgrip, the man-fox of Mulberry street into Papa Pangborn's. I wish I had let you go on, but Foxy took the hand you held and made a poor play."

"What did he do?" cried Floss. "Did he try to get the detective into the old Jew's?"

"He did."

"And failed?"

"Yes, curse Foxy's boasted cuteness!" grated the Raven.

Floss seemed to look thankful over Foxy's failure.

"If he had succeeded, the greatest obstacle in our path would have been brushed aside," Raven Rob went on. "You have seen this city Vidocq, haven't you, Floss."

"Yes."

"Did he ever speak to you?"

"No, but once I caught him following me."

"When you were playing decoy for Bowery Burt?"

The girl dropped her eyes.

"I wonder if he has any suspicions?" the Raven asked himself mentally. "I haven't got much from the girl, but I'm not disheartened. By Jericho! she never falls back into Bowery Burt's claws! I call her one of the best cards in my hands. I don't care whether Foxy turns up or not. I'm able to manage the game without his assistance. He failed at Papa Pangborn's and I at Queen Helen's. I think I had an antagonist as cool as his. Ho! there ar' somebody at my front door. The girl didn't hear him, but I'm used to this house."

He left Floss sudden enough to arouse her suspicions; and the door was closed and locked behind him before she could stir.

"It can be nobody but Foxy, sneaking back from his lost game," ejaculated Raven Rob moving toward the front door. "The next time he tries to play woman on a ferret like Captain Coldgrip, he will have the benefit of his last experience. Ho! here we are, Foxy!" as he unbolted the door. "Walk in, fool, and give me—"

Raven Rob stopped abruptly and then recoiled half-way across the room with a hand clutched about the butt of a half-drawn revolver.

"Throw up your hands, Raven," said the stern voice of the handsome man who sprung into the room. "Don't be a fool when I have the drop on you! Hands up, I say! If you don't obey, I'll drop you in your boots!"

"Caught!" growled the Raven. "Caught by the man I don't want to see hyer—Captain Coldgrip."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## TRACKED.

RAVEN ROB saw there was but one reasonable thing for him to do, and that was to throw up his hands. He let the half-drawn revolver slip back into his pocket, and sullenly obeyed the man before him.

"What does this mean?" he blurted madly, as the detective stepped forward. "You fellows ar' always hunting down honest people."

Captain Coldgrip laughed in the Raven's face.

"Yes, it's always the honest who are visited by men of my class," he said. "Did you expect to open the door to Foxy, my friend?"

"What if I did?" growled Raven Rob. "Certain it is, Captain Coldgrip, that I did not look for you. What if I were to tell you that I don't know anybody called Foxy?"

"It wouldn't go down very far," was the quick reply. "You will never open your door to him unless you want the funeral conducted from your house."

Raven Rob started forward with a low cry, and with the mien of a suddenly aroused lion.

He was about to speak in a loud tone, when he thought of the girl separated from him by the thickness of a door.

"What is that, Claude Coldgrip?" he said, lowering his voice. "Is Foxy dead?"

"Dead," said the detective.

"He was seen with you last," continued the Raven.

"He was seen later," said the man-fox with a smile.

"Who killed Foxy?"

"Ho! you think he was liable to die by violence, eh, Raven Rob?" exclaimed Coldgrip.

"Why don't you tell me?" demanded Floss's persecutor. "Did you turn on Foxy when he was playin' decoy an' snuff his candle?"

"No. I merely tossed him into Papa Pangborn's establishment. He may be there yet."

"Dead, you say?"

"Yes."

"By Jehu! I'd like to see the person who did this!" flashed the Raven. "Yes, I knew Foxy. Circumstances made us friends. Has anybody been arrested for killing him?"

"Not yet."

"What does the old Jew dog say?"

"He professes not to have had anything to do with the crime."

"The old liar!" cried Raven Rob. "Give me a chance and I'll choke a full confession from him. Papa Pangborn couldn't hoodwink me—the miserable old hawk! Are you going to let me get at him, Captain Coldgrip?"

"That depends," was the reply. "I am here for a purpose that may surprise you, but I tell you beforehand, that I will take no denial. I want to see the girl known to some people as Floss."

Raven Rob went back from the detective, and looked at him in his old, defiant manner.

"Floss?" he said, speaking through his teeth.

"Who is Floss?"

"Come! no by-plays, Raven Rob," was the retort. "Floss is the girl held in bonds by Bowery Burt."

"Then ask Bowery Burt—not me." Captain Coldgrip was seen to get a firmer grip on the revolver in his right hand. "I give you one minute in which to make up your decision," he said to the cornered villain. "You came straight from Floss to the door by which I entered this house. This is man against man, Raven Rob. You don't want the Sawyer or the Day cases opened up, do you?" Raven Rob suddenly turned livid.

"This man-fox knows what kind of a hand to play," he mentally ejaculated. "He knows I doesn't want those old crimes disturbed. I've got to give the girl up, but Jehu! won't I retort with a cyclone hand before long?"

Then he looked at the cool blade in his front.

"What's the girl to you?" he asked.

"Never mind that. I am here to take her from this trap. You will produce her at once."

"That's in the neighborhood of immediately," grinned the Raven. "You seem to know that I can produce Floss."

"I know it," and Captain Coldgrip threw a quick glance toward the door that hid Bowery Burt's young ward.

Raven Rob saw the look and moved across the room covered by the man ferret's revolver and watched closely.

He knew that the Raven was treacherous, that he would not hesitate to take advantage of the first opportunity that presented itself, and that he would use that advantage to the full extent of a desperado's powers.

"You need watching as a tiger does," said the detective to himself. "I'm not going to let you get a finger uppermost, Raven Rob."

The city desperado continued to move across the room until he reached the door.

He hesitated there.

Well did he know that Floss was just beyond the portal—Floss, the girl whom he considered worth her weight in diamonds if he could only play his game out.

He could have colored the walls with the brains of the cool detective who had come between.

How had Captain Coldgrip discovered that Floss was in the house? By what means had he found the girl's trail?

He had been commissioned by Ferguson Fowler, the millionaire to break up the Dragon League. Why did he want to rescue Floss if she was only Bowery Burt's young decoy?

"Open the door!" said the captain, sternly, breaking in upon Raven Rob's reflections.

"Your life for this!" hissed the city panther, and then he drew a key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock.

A brief silence followed the recoil of the bolt and then the Raven sullenly kicked the door open.

"Take your prize!" he said, sending a mad look over his shoulder at Captain Coldgrip.

The next moment an exclamation came from the room beyond the door, and a young girl bounded forward.

"Floss!" said the detective, as she came to a sudden halt and looked astonished into his face.

"Ah! you are Claude Coldgrip, the detective," she said, and then, with a furtive glance of fear at Raven Rob, she went forward.

The Raven looked on with wedded lips and gleaming eyes.

He saw that the game was up.

"Will you come with me, or do these quarters suit you?" said the detective, addressing Floss.

"Heavens! not this house," was the answer. "I will go with you from the clutches of that man there."

"To come back here some time!" growled the Raven under his breath. "If you think this is the end of the game, Captain Coldgrip, time will show what a fool you are!"

Floss looked anxiously toward the door that led into the street, for she was eager to cross its threshold.

The man-hunter saw the glance.

"In a moment," his look said to the girl, and then he looked at Raven Rob.

"I will leave you now," he said. "You will take up a new hand, I suppose?"

The Raven's glare was answer enough.

"Let the future demonstrate that," he said.

"You are at liberty to make any play against me you see fit to," the detective went on. "I shall not hesitate to turn on you whenever I find you at my heels. I sha'n't threaten you with any of your old crimes; I will play with the hand I hold when we meet."

"All right," growled Raven Rob. "If I had known you were at the door when I opened it, I would have killed you in your shoes. I sail under no false colors against you, Captain Coldgrip. Remember, from this time on that your play to-night will be met one of these days with another equally successful—that is, if you don't steal a march on Raven Rob."

The New York detective smiled and dropped his left hand to the girl's wrist.

"We go now, Floss," he said, and watched savagely by the baffled man-tiger in the middle of the room, he led the girl to the front door, which she opened, and the pair passed out.

"Do you want to go back to Bowery Burt?"

asked the detective, looking down into Floss's face, revealed to him by the street lamp.

"Not if I can go elsewhere," said the girl.

"You can. I do not ask you to turn from Bowery Burt, but I leave it all to you."

"Then I would not go back there."

The two started off, walking rapidly, and in time turned into the Bowery.

More than once Floss looked up into the detective's face and always caught him watching her.

There was surprise and subdued excitement in Captain Coldgrip's eyes, and he wore the countenance of a man who thinks he has made a startling discovery.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed a man who caught sight of the pair under one of the Bowery lamps. "Shoot me for a clam, if the ferret hasn't made a ten strike by some means! He has found Floss. I wonder where he got her. Mebbe he spotted the Raven and raked in the stakes. By Jove! my city Vidocq, we'll see where you take the girl, because I'm the man who wants to know, you know."

A chuckle followed the last sentence, and before it had died away Captain Coldgrip had a man on his track.

This man wore a fur cap that was pulled down over his head and almost hid his cunning little eyes. He had a quick, almost noiseless step, and he did not take his gaze for a moment from the ferret and his prize after he had once spotted them.

Captain Coldgrip conducted Floss to his own quarters in the Bowery, a quiet and plain house, and gave up his own little room to her.

"It i n't a king's palace, but it's a resting-place," he said to the girl in an apologetic way. "It may be better than Bowery Burt's or the Raven's. You will remain here as long as you wish, or until I find you better quarters; that is, if the wolves of New York don't carry you off."

"The wolves?" echoed Floss, her eyes dilating. "Am I to be hunted?"

"I would not be surprised. You have left Bowery Burt; he won't like to give you up. I have taken you from Raven Rob, and against his wishes. These are two of the wolves of Gotham, and they will more than show their teeth."

"Forgive me!" cried Floss, springing to the detective and grasping his arm. "I don't deserve a whit of this kindness at your hands. I was to have decoyed you into Papa Pangborn's, and set out on my mission. I would have done it, perhaps, but was taken off the street by Foxy and the Raven."

"And Foxy played the hand out to his doom!" said the trailer. "Floss, you don't want to thank me for anything I do. I am a man of duty, and believe my duty is to take you from the power of such men as Bowery Burt and Raven Rob."

"I wish I could pay you in some manner for this work," the girl went on, her handsome eyes suddenly filling. "I can—I will! I can tell you that Ferguson Fowler's papers and the diamond dragon are in the hands of Elegant Ahab and the woman called Queen Helen."

Captain Coldgrip started slightly and then broke into a laugh.

"I believe I can say I already know that," he said.

"But there is one thing you don't know," Floss went on. "You do not know that there is a small dragon tattooed on my arm!"

The detective uttered a singular cry.

"What does it mean?" continued the girl. "Has it anything to do with the metallic dragon stolen from Ferg Fowler, the New York money king, by Elegant Ahab? I never dared ask Bowery Burt, though I am almost certain that he knows I am thus tattooed."

Captain Coldgrip looked down into Floss's face, but did not speak.

"I have astonished you, I see," she said.

"Not very much, my girl," was the answer. "I have been on two trails instead of one for some time, and I believe they are going to run together."

At that moment a certain man in a fur cap was eying the house from the opposite side of the street.

All at once a closed carriage, moving at a rapid gait, approached the sidewalk where he stood.

The watcher seemed undecided whether to stay or fly.

Before he could make up his mind, the carriage stopped in the gutter before him and the door flew open.

"Get in here!" said the voice of a man on the inside. "I want you the worst kind. By Jove! this is luck itself. Jump in, Bowery Burt!"

"Here I am, Ahab!" was the reply, and the vehicle rattled off again.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### BOWERY BURT OUTWITTED.

"How did I come to find you here?" asked Elegant Ahab.

"Just happened that way, I guess," said Bowery Burt, thankful that the man who addressed him could not see his face for the darkness. "What has happened?"

"Two things," was the answer.

"Do they concern the game?"

"They do."

"Well, give me the lay-out."

The carriage was moving rapidly up the street, and the men did not try to bridle their tongues.

"In the first place, I've seen Duke Dado to-night," said Elegant Ahab.

"Oho! the dwarf Ferg Fowler fetched home with him from that European trip?"

"Yes."

"I have reasons for suspecting that the imp was dogging me."

"Where did you see him?"

"On Broadway, near Union Square."

"Was he alone?"

"He seemed to be."

Bowery Burt was silent for a moment.

"Well, what is the next event?" he asked.

"Helen had a visitor."

"To-night?"

"Not very long ago."

"What was his business?"

"He wanted the papers and the dragon."

"Holy Hezekiah!" ejaculated Bowery Burt.

"He was cooler than Mephistopheles," continued Elegant Ahab.

"Then it was Captain Coldgrip!"

"You are quite mistaken. He called himself Robert Randolph in a derisive manner. Helen can read men pretty well, you know. She says that this one is an old-timer in deep playing—a regular b'hoi in the art, as it were."

"I know him, then!" exclaimed Bowery Burt.

"You?"

"Yes. I'll bet my head he is the man I wanted to see an hour ago—Raven Rob, Foxy's pard."

"Do you really think so?" asked Elegant Ahab eagerly.

"I do. What did the fellow do?"

"He made the house look as if a cyclone had passed through. He ransacked everything—dived into the bureaus, looked into the dressing stands—played hob generally."

"Where was Helen all this time?"

"Choked into unconsciousness on the sofa," growled Ahab. "If I had been there to have received the devil, there would have been a private funeral from the Dragon Palace. It happened just after I had left."

"Did he find what he wanted?" asked Bowery Burt.

"Fortunately no. The prizes are still safe."

"Good for that!"

"But with this cool and dangerous devil on the track, something must be done quickly. I don't think he will come again soon with the same kind of a hand, but he won't put up with one failure."

"Well?"

"After consulting with Helen I am in favor of a big play," Elegant Ahab went on.

"Against Ferg Fowler?"

"Yes."

"What is the nature of your play?"

"We must spring the heiress trap. Helen knows her part well enough to play it through. She is getting impatient. She still upbraids me because I did not kill Captain Coldgrip when I left him unconscious in the millionaire's library."

"There is where you missed it, sure enough," said Bowery Burt. "You don't catch me letting a rat out of the trap if I can help it."

"I think I failed to deal a stunning blow then, but we can't recall it now. Helen is ready to face Ferg Fowler as Frances Percy. The papers have helped us a great deal. The tattoo on her arm has healed, and looks excellent. The game is in our hands. What do you say?"

If Elegant Ahab could have seen the face of his companion at that moment, he would have shown surprise.

Bowery Burt did not like the game proposed; his glittering eyes showed that the kid-gloved sport had proposed a *coup* which was distasteful.

"I don't like to play this new hand with Captain Coldgrip on the trail," Bowery Burt said, when Elegant Ahab was becoming impatient over his perplexing silence. "This ferret has a faculty of turning up just when he is not wanted."

"You don't think that Helen can't play Frances, eh?" exclaimed Ahab.

"No—not that. She can sustain any *role*, but can we afford to let her turn up as Frances Percy with this Captain Coldgrip on track of us?"

Elegant Ahab was silent, and the carriage traversed a whole block before he spoke again.

"Don't you consider it a little dangerous?" said the voice of Bowery Burt in the darkness.

"There is risk with all plays," was the reply.

"Of course, and an almighty big one with this scheme, I think," Bowery Burt said, and then the Bowery fox continued to himself:

"I must hold this move off. I have found Floss—I know where I can lay my hands on her. I'm not very anxious to see Helen walk upon the stage as Frances—not just now, anyhow."

"Bowery Burt, you belong to the League,"

continued Elegant Ahab. "You are to share equally with us."

"I know that."

"There will be two millions apiece, for we are going to strip Ferg Fowler of every dollar."

"That's the game," said Bowery Burt; "but I don't want to show a hand until we can sustain it—don't you see? What has just happened? A cool devil—the pard of Foxy, who decoyed Claude Coldgrip to Papa Pangborn's—has tried to put his hand on the prizes. He knows we have them, and you can bet your head that he also knows that we do not train with the real Percy heiress. If you say this game shall be played, Ahab—if you and Queen Helen insist upon it—played it shall be!"

"With your assistance?"

"Yes," said Bowery Burt, with a hesitation scarcely perceptible.

The next moment the Bowery villain felt his hand grasped in the gloom of the carriage.

"Very well," said Elegant Ahab. "The move is to be made. Helen insists upon it."

"When?"

"During the next forty-eight hours."

"That will give us a little time."

"For what?"

"To run the Raven and Captain Coldgrip down."

"I will do my share. Helen is to appear to Ferg Fowler like a person from the grave. I told him we could produce the heiress, but I offered to waive all claims on him for a million."

"He would not consent?"

"He relies on this city ferret to run us down and save him. With the ease that we've got, I would not be afraid to go to court."

"Please excuse this gent from that ordeal," said Bowery Burt with a chuckle, and then he thought of his narrow escape from the police officer that very night. Bowery Burt was not anxious to mount the witness-stand in a court of law; the crime of the old Jew's house had put his neck into the shadow of the rope.

Meanwhile, the carriage had traversed considerable distance, and before either of the conspirators spoke again, it drew toward the curb of a certain house on Canal street.

"Here we are!" said Elegant Ahab, opening the door of the vehicle. "I would not be surprised to find Helen waiting for us."

The carriage was dismissed and rolled away, while the two men entered the house by aid of a night-key produced by the kidded sport.

At the first alley-opening, something dark dropped to the ground from behind the carriage. In another instant it developed itself into a human being, and before the vehicle was out of sight it had disappeared in the alley.

"Hang me! if it doesn't cramp a fellow terribly to play spy like that," said this person who was small of stature, indeed a dwarf. "I'll have to oil up to get the kinks out of me. I'll drop into Simon Peter's place and proceed to do so."

He moved down the alley till he reached a door beyond whose transom there was a feeble light.

He lifted a latch and walked into a dirty-looking bar-room with a short counter and a still shorter man doing duty behind it.

Simon Peter's was one of the poorest whisky dens in that part of the city, and as an all-night house, it got a certain custom which some of the other saloons did not enjoy.

Several rough-looking characters stood at the bar when the dwarf entered.

They all looked at him for a moment and then returned to the story Simon Peter was telling. The dwarf moved down the counter behind the three men and got between the last one and the wall.

He had not removed from his clothes all trace of his uncomfortable ride, and his face was smeared with the grime of the under part of the carriage.

The chubby owner of the alley den took no notice of the dwarf till he had finished his coarse narrative when he came toward him with his usual "Whisky, eh?"

The little spy could be as sententious as Simon Peter.

"Whisky," said the dwarf in a tone which seemed only the echo of the barkeeper's question.

The usual long-necked blue bottle and a small glass were placed before the dwarf, and Simon Peter left him to himself.

At that moment the door-latch clicked again, and the little man glancing up saw the person who came in.

Bowery Burt!

In an instant the dwarf became as immovable as one of the pyramids.

He seemed to become a part of the dingy wall itself, but from under his deep black lashes he watched Bowery Burt like a hawk.

Between him and the new-comer stood three big men and their bodies shielded him pretty well.

But what if they should move back and expose him? And this they were liable to do, for they had no interest in the dwarf.

Bowery Burt walked to the end of the counter and caught Simon Peter's eye.

The little whisky-dealer came toward him with bottle and glass.

The Bowery sport filled the latter and gulped its contents down. Then he repeated the experiment and very reluctantly pushed the bottle away.

As he stepped back he threw a look at the three men whose bodies shielded the dwarf; then his glance seemed to fall to the almost breathless spy.

It was a moment of suspense.

The dwarf's head was just above the counter, but the brawny arm of one of the late drinkers almost hid it.

Bowery Burt had a keen eye and a quick perception.

He suddenly lifted his head a little more and appeared to lean forward.

"The Bowery thug sees me," muttered the dwarf. "He'll pounce upon me like an eagle if I don't open the ball. His astonishment won't last three seconds for he is a man quick to act."

These thoughts flashed across the dwarf's brain in the fraction of a second.

His hand which was resting at his hip suddenly brought something into the light. The next moment Bowery Burt left the end of the counter and took a step which threw him in a line with the three men.

At that moment the dwarf came also into view.

"Not a step further!" rung suddenly from his throat as he covered Bowery Burt with a revolver. "Move a hand toward the dropper you are never without, and I'll toss you to the corner!"

The three men at the counter stood spellbound at this sudden play. Indeed, they had nearly forgotten the dwarf, but he was now giving startling evidence of his presence.

Bowery Burt thunderstruck by this *coup*, stood like a person glued to the floor.

He saw behind the leveled weapon a pair of little eyes that fairly blazed.

The dwarf had the upper hand.

"I suspect that you know me, Bowery," continued the little man. "You have cheated me out of a drink, but let it go—I'll get one elsewhere."

During this speech the dwarf was moving toward the door, his eyes still riveted upon the baffled Shadow.

All at once the door opened and something passed out, then it shut with a bang!

"I'll get the atom yet!" cried Bowery Burt covering the space at a bound.

The next moment he was in the alley; but the dwarf had vanished.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### A TIGER ROBS HIS OWN.

"THE presence of that atom here means something. Why did I let him get the drop on me? Elegant Ahab was not mistaken when he told me in the carriage that Duke Dado, Ferg Fowler's runaway dwarf, was at his heels tonight."

Bowery Burt gave utterance to language like this while he stood in the alley near Simon Peter's door and realized that the dwarf had eluded him.

"Shall I go back and report?" he continued. "I do not have to, yet, if Helen knew that Dado may have heard me and Ahab talking in the cab, she might alter her mind about the big card she is bent on playing. Why can't I play a hand, too?" And Bowery Burt's eyes grew bright at the suggestion. "If she plays hers out successfully, maybe I will make a fizzle of my scheme."

He drew forth a watch and consulted it for a moment. "I'll let Floss go for the present," he went on. "I b'lieve I can feather my nest between now and daylight. Helen will go to the money-king without the documents; she will rely on the tattoo on her arm. That will be enough to throw Ferg Fowler into convulsions!"

Bowery Burt laughed to himself as he left the alley and walked back to the house of Helen Hotspur, which was not far off.

He let himself in with a night-key and closed the door behind him.

"Is that you, Bowery?" asked a voice from somewhere overhead.

"It's nobody else, cap'n," was the answer. "I guess I'll turn in and rest up for the big throw."

"All right!"

The Bowery villain smiled to himself and passed up the stair before him.

"My opinion is that this game of Helen's will fail," he said to himself. "She will go to Ferg Fowler and announce herself as the true Percy heir. She will show him a dragon tattooed on her arm—an exact imitation of the diamond one now in our possession. Ferg Fowler won't give up his millions unless the stolen things are returned. I know the man pretty well. Let me play the hand I want to, and I can clutch the whole pill. Elegant Ahab is cool and shrewd; he discovered Helen and put this whole gigantic scheme in her head. She has throwd her whole soul into it. She would kill for it. She hates Nydia, Ferg Fowler's ward. She told me the other day that she intended to throw the girl

out of doors without a dollar. I wouldn't do that quite, as hard as I am." And Bowery Burt, sitting on the side of a little bed in a small room on the second floor, supplemented his remarks with a laugh.

In a little while the house was quiet, but there was at least one person in it who was not asleep.

Bowery Burt had a good-deal of patience, and he used it with effect as the hours wore on.

One—two—three o'clock came.

At last the Shadow moved across the room and listened at the door.

He heard no sound.

Slowly and softly he crossed the threshold in his stocking feet and went down the stair.

There was the movement of the burglar in the subtlety of the Bowery Shadow.

At the foot of the stair he paused and listened.

"I guess the cats are asleep," he smiled to himself. "Play this hand cool, Bowery Burt; it is a big one."

The Shadow crept through the dark hall and found the door as if he had the eyes of an owl.

He tried the knob, but it would not turn.

"Mebbe I'd better look after Elegant Ahab first," he muttered, going back.

He soon found another door which stood ajar, and a moment later he stood in a room whose interior was revealed by a small gas-jet.

Bowery Burt moved toward a bed which his sharp eyes had discovered.

"If he wakes, I'll make out that I heard something," he said. "But I know how Ahab sleeps—like a rock."

In a moment he was leaning over the handsome face of Elegant Ahab on one of the pillows.

The chief of the Dragon League was fast asleep, and the eyes of Bowery Burt blazed while he looked at him.

"A daisy, ain't he?" grinned the Shadow. "If the law had its own, it would lengthen that darling neck of his'n. Mebbe he's dreaming of the big play, but not the one that's in my head just now."

Bowery Burt left the kidded sport and turned back; he went to the door he had first visited.

In another moment he had a key in the lock, and the bolt recoiled without noise.

After a minute's silence the Shadow pushed the door open.

As in Elegant Ahab's sleeping apartment, there was a light in this, but it came from a small lamp on an elegant dressing-stand.

A glance would have told any one that the Bowery sport was in a woman's sleeping chamber, and the beautiful face half-buried in the pillows would have confirmed it.

Bowery Burt glided to the bed and looked at Queen Helen.

There was a strange gleam in the fellow's eyes.

"They don't pick up Cleopatras like this one—every day," he ejaculated inaudibly. "By Jove! I imagine her standing before Ferg Fowler as the supposed heir of the English major's millions! She kin play the game, too—has the sand and the coolness."

At that moment one of the arms of the sleeper moved, and the Shadow almost gave vent to a startled cry.

"Thar it is!" he said, staring at a certain object which had been brought into view by the movement. "Thar's ther tattooed dragon that is to establish her identity. The work is well done, sure enough. It will knock the nabob clean off his pins. I know another mark like that, Queen Helen. It's been in its place longer than the one on your arm. I don't want a divide of the big bonanza; by Jupiter! I want it all myself!"

He turned away with a parting look at the fair sleeper and lowered the light a little more.

Bowery Burt had taken a certain very natural precaution before entering Helen's room.

After leaving Elegant Ahab he had clapped a set of false whiskers upon his face, thereby completely altering his looks.

He crept toward a small picture that hung on the wall. Raven Rob had looked behind it in his hunt for the diamond dragon, but his eyes, sharp as they were, had discovered nothing there.

Bowery Burt took the picture down carefully, and then pressed a certain figure on the elegant paper.

Immediately a small opening appeared in the wall.

The rascal's eyes got an additional gleam at this.

Before he thrust his tapering fingers into the opening, he looked over his shoulder toward the bed. The sleeper there had not stirred.

In another minute Bowery Burt held something in his hand.

"I've got the agents of success!" he ejaculated, thrusting the "find" into his pocket. "I will cover up my track in a manner that will hoodwink Elegant Ahab and the queen. Let 'em play their new hand if they can't wait till we have removed the detective and the Raven! By Jove! if the test comes neither Ahab nor Helen dare get up in court and say that I b'long to the Dragon League!"

The door in the wall shut as noiselessly as it had opened, and the Shadow hung the picture back in its place.

He then moved toward the hall beyond the room and turned on the light again as he went by.

All at once he heard a noise that made him look toward the couch.

To his horror and astonishment Helen Hotspur was sitting bolt upright, and her eyes were fixed upon him in a wonder-struck stare!

"Jehu! this won't do!" cried Bowery Burt. "This is a surprise not down on the bills. I don't let any hand floor me at this stage of the game. What if the girl sounds the alarm?"

The situation fairly filled the thug in his stocking feet.

All at once he bounded forward like the jungle tiger, and landed with the noiselessness of that beast at Queen Helen's bed.

In a flash his hands flew at her throat and tightened there. Not a word did he utter; he did not want his voice to sound in the woman's ears.

Bowery Burt had leaped forward just in time, for a wild cry was trembling on Helen's lips.

The fury of an Othello shone in the Bowery Shadow's eyes.

He saw the woman's frantic struggles cease, and at last he threw her away.

"Raven Rob throttled you, my leopardess, and found nothing; but I have got the key to the city bonanza!" he hissed. Now, for the cutest play of all."

Bowery Burt passed into the hall and unlocked the door; then he went to the threshold of Elegant Ahab's chamber, and listened for the space of ten minutes.

"The next play comes now," he said, and then with a bound he covered the distance between Elegant Ahab and the door, and was shaking the kidded sport out of a deep slumber.

"Get up, for God's sake!" cried Bowery Burt at Ahab's ear. "The house has been tapped again!"

Elegant Ahab was on the floor in a minute. He had a wild and frightened stare, and, revolver in hand, he faced Bowery Burt ready for any work.

"Somebody has just left the house," continued Burt. "I heard the door shut and it is unlocked."

"The Raven has played another hand, maybe!" cried Ahab.

"I should not be surprised," was the cool reply.

Elegant Ahab darted away, and in a second was in Helen's room.

"Great God! look here!" he exclaimed, holding the lamp over the unconscious beauty on the bed. "You are right, Burt!—somebody has been here!"

Ahab did not see the light that seemed to dance in the depths of his companion's eyes.

The sight before him was, to him, one full of horror.

"The dockments," said Bowery Burt. "I wonder if the devil found 'em out."

Elegant Ahab sprung to the picture, tore it from its fastenings, and touched the secret spring.

The door in the wall flew open, and in went his hand. The next instant he withdrew it with an exclamation of surprise.

"Gone, eh?" asked Bowery Burt.

"Gone!" echoed Elegant Ahab, wheeling upon his partner and coming toward him with colorless face. "We have been robbed of the best weapons we had. The documents—those that fitted Helen for the part she is to play, with the diamond dragon—are gone! To Hades with the thief who robbed the treasury! He must not be permitted to turn his hand to advantage. By the souls of the saints! he never shall! Whether the Raven did this or the ferret, our game must go on all the same. There are millions at stake, Bowery Burt. We must get ahead of the thief. If it is Raven Rob, he is playing for himself; if Captain Coldgrip, for Ferg Fowler. Helen may have seen and recognized the fiend. She has been choked into insensibility, which almost proves the thief to have been the Raven. He did this once before, you know."

Half an hour later Bowery Burt, with a cool smile under his drooping mustache, was listening to Queen Helen's story of the robbery.

She could not fully describe the man who had played burglar and tiger in her room, he had operated with such quickness and force.

"The game goes on with the treasury empty!" said the woman firmly. "You men will hunt for the thief and I will throw her bomb into the gold camp."

"With affairs in this shape?" asked Bowery Burt.

"Yes! The man who carried off the prize can do but one thing—attempt to sell the dragon and the papers to the millionaire. When I come upon the scene with the tattoo on my arm—when I confront him in his library as Frances Percy, and show him the mark which the child Frances had on her arm, as all England and one-half of America knew after the Englishman's death—I will drive the golden wedge home! Keep Captain Coldgrip from me till after tomorrow night; prevent him from picking up

another thread till then, and I will show you Helen Hotspur's play!"

"It shall be done!" said Elegant Ahab. "If Captain Coldgrip thinks a kidded gentleman is not dangerous, he may discover his error to his cost. Now, Bowery Burt, we have big work to do. You know more man-traps than the one in Papa Pangborn's house. We must chain this man, who always turns up just when he isn't wanted. Helen shall make her play in spite of Tartarus. Now or never!"

"That is my motto—now or never!" cried the woman.

"Put the play off till to-morrow night," said Bowery Burt. "Give me time to get the rat in the trap."

"Agreed. To-morrow night Frances Percy claims her own," answered Elegant Ahab.

"I guess I've got string enough," murmured Bowery Burt as he walked from the house with the diamond dragon in his pocket.

It was the dawn of another day.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### TRAP NUMBER TWO.

That same day, and early in the morning before many of the late sleepers were astir, Captain Coldgrip walked into his quiet apartments on the Bowery and was greeted by Floss.

The detective saw at once that the girl had something to communicate, and she soon handed him a letter with the explanatory remark that it had been brought to the room by a small boy who did not look like a street arab.

Captain Coldgrip took the letter and looked into Floss's face with a pleasant smile.

"The wolves haven't called yet, my girl?" he said.

"Not yet, and my wish is that they will keep their distance," was the quick reply.

"One of them is not in a good fix to show his teeth," he went on, as he tore open the envelope.

"Is it my jailer, Raven Rob?"

"No, the other one—Bowery Burt. Ere this he has changed his plumage and is flying, if indeed he is at large, in borrowed feathers. The police want him just now—for murder."

The girl started and repeated the man-ferret's words:

"For murder?"

"Papa Pangborn sees an opportunity to save his own neck," said Captain Coldgrip. "He informed the police last night that there was a dead man in his house and that he believes he was killed by Bowery Burt. An officer was detailed to make the arrest. He found Burt at his own quarters, but the slippery fellow effected his escape. I don't think he will exert himself hunting you now with the coppers of Gotham on the lookout for him," and then the detective opened his letter and began to read.

"I am wanted, and by a lady!" he ejaculated, looking up into Floss's face. "Mrs. Hannah Hoyle wants to see me on business that can't be delayed. She sends the letter by her son she writes. What was the boy like, Floss?"

"He was cleanly dressed and rather good-looking. I should think he was nine or ten years old, and somewhat bashful."

"I think I have seen this Mrs. Hoyle at the window of her little confectionery."

"Where does she keep?"

"Houston, below Broadway."

Floss was seen to give a slight start.

"Will you let me see the letter?" she asked, putting out her hand.

"Certainly," and the little sheet was placed in her possession.

Instantly the girl seemed to forget the presence of the detective, for her eyes were riveted on the writing which made up the following letter:

"CAPTAIN COLDGRIP, of the Police:—

"I wish you would come to my house as soon after you receive this as possible. I believe I have certain information which will be of value to you ere long. I don't pretend to be a spy or anything of that sort, but I always want to see justice done. I keep a confectionery on south side Houston, below Broadway. I am a widow with one child, the little boy who will carry this to you. Please do come immediately. If you knew what I know, you would come at once."

"Mrs. HANNAH HOYLE."

Captain Coldgrip saw Floss read this letter to the end, and then go back and read it again.

"It is a study and a puzzle to her," he said mentally. "Ah! she is going to give her conclusions now."

At that moment Floss lifted her eyes and caught the great detective's gaze.

"Do you really know the Widow Hoyle?" she asked.

"I do not, but I believe I have noticed her place of business. What do you know about her?"

"Nothing, only that Bowery Burt sent me there once."

"Aha! is the hand of this hunted Shadow still in the game?" exclaimed Captain Coldgrip.

"How does it look to you?" asked Floss.

"Rather suspicious since you have mentioned Bowery Burt's name."

"It may be all right," said the girl. "Bowery Burt once sent me to Mrs. Hoyle with a letter, and she gave me a packet from which he took a gold watch when I returned."

Captain Coldgrip's countenance brightened suddenly.

"I will see this innocent place," he said. "I will find out what Mrs. Hoyle knows."

"Beware!" cried Floss. "If the subtle hand of Bowery Burt is in this play, I have a right to say, beware!"

The detective took the letter and looked it over carefully.

"This was dictated," he said slowly. "I can see that between the lines. Very well, Bowery Burt; if this is another decoy, we will see what will come of it."

Twenty minutes later a man who did not look much like Claude Coldgrip stepped in front of Mrs. Hoyle's window as if inspecting the samples of sweetmeats which were for sale within.

He looked shorter than the detective, his face was covered by a dark-brown beard, and his clothes denoted an individual of no particular occupation.

Behind a counter on the inside sat a large woman who was Amazonian in proportions. She filled the space between counter and shelves, and was one of those creatures who are always ready to make a dime.

She got up suddenly as the man described strolled into the little confectionery. Her eyes twinkled with greed.

If the supposed customer was on the lookout he might have seen her dart a look toward the further end of the room where a curtained arch led the way to what was labeled a—

"LADIES' AND GENTS' ICE CREAM PARLOR."

The visitor seemed to be entirely oblivious of a look of this kind; he quietly took in the woman's stock in trade and remarked that he would take a "dime's worth of caramels."

Mrs. Hannah Hoyle began to adjust the little scales on the counter when the customer suddenly leaned toward her.

"What is it you want?" he asked. "I am the man you wrote to."

A sudden change took place. Mrs. Hoyle started quickly and looked into the man's eyes.

"So you are he?" she said in a coarse voice. "You will pardon me for not knowing you in that rig. Yes, I want to see you. Step back into the house, please, captain."

The woman astonished at first had entirely recovered. She threw another significant look toward the cream department of her shop, and moved forward.

"Not just yet," said the detective, suddenly catching her wrist as he leaned over the counter. "Your store is quiet enough for a conference. The street outside is the same. You sent for me. I am here. Now, what do you want?"

"What I don't want is somebody to overhear my business with you," said the woman with some spirit. "I could have sent for Tom Keenear, but I have something for you. However, and she suddenly assumed an air of indifference well calculated to deceive, "however, if you don't want to hear me in private, Captain Coldgrip, I can postpone the business indefinitely. It's all one to me, however. I thought I was doing you a favor."

"This woman talks too much," mentally ejaculated the city reynard. "I am now convinced that Floss's suspicions were well founded."

He had dropped Mrs. Hoyle's wrist and she had marched back to her chair.

"You won't transact the business here, eh?" resumed the detective.

"Not a word of it!" snapped the woman.

A smile appeared at the corners of Captain Coldgrip's mouth.

"Will you let me ask you whether Bowery Burt dictates all the letters you pen?" he said, lowering his voice.

The woman recoiled from the ferret's gaze.

"Do you think me not on the square?" she cried, her eyes flashing fire as she sprung up and seemed about to throw herself across the counter upon him. "I'm an honest woman who doesn't call it a crime to support herself and child by keeping a few candies. Bowery Burt, sir? Who is he? You try to connect me with a person whose name is an enigma. Is this your answer to my honest letter, Captain Coldgrip?"

The detective knew that this indignation had nothing honest connected with it.

"Don't go off like dynamite," he said coolly, as he looked the woman down. "I merely asked you whether one Bowery Burt who is just now wanted for murder, dictates all your letters."

"No sir! and if he did, you would be the last man to whom I would betray him."

"Ho! ho! just as I thought," said Captain Coldgrip. "I will inform you now that the scheme won't work. You run a man-trap on too small a scale, Mrs. Hoyle."

"A man-trap is it I keep?" exclaimed the woman, and the next moment she came around the end of the counter and advanced upon the detective with clinched fists.

All at once she got between him and the street door, and towering like a mountain of passion in his front compelled him to face her.

This state of affairs forced the city sleuth to turn his back on the curtained arch of the ice-cream parlor.

"I'll show you what it is to insult Hannah Hoyle, a respectable widow in her own house!" The Amazon went on, her rage seeming to increase. "I sent for you on business and because I don't transact it in ear-shot of the rabble, you connect me with somebody supposed to be without character. I could relieve you of those eyes with which you track criminals down! I ought to thrash the floor of my shop with you!"

She took a menacing step forward and looked like a veritable tigress.

Her bulky body loomed between the detective and the door, and her twitching fingers showed how eager they were to assist in carrying out the last threat.

"I must get rid of this vixen. She has exposed the plot Floss so cleverly suggested. I can't remain here when I am wanted elsewhere on the Dragon League's trail!" said the captain.

These sentences framed themselves rapidly in the detective's mind, but the next instant something occurred that dissipated every one.

All at once there leaped from the curtains a man who had the ferociousness of the bloodhound.

He fell upon Captain Coldgrip like a thunderbolt, and although the detective was his physical superior, he was in his power.

"You won't come to me, so by Jupiter! I come to you!" hissed the assailant, whose face was covered by a thick dark beard. "There's more man-traps in New York than the ones Papa Pangborn operates! Here, Hannah! take a hand in this game!"

The Amazon sprung forward and caught the detective who had recovered and was giving the man battle. Her strength was prodigious, and between the two Captain Coldgrip was hustled into the darkened room whither subtle words had failed to take him.

In the demi-darkness, he felt two tremendous hands find his throat.

"We've got him now, Hannah! To the cupboard with him. Ah! this play wins a cool million!"

The captain heard these words from the man's throat, as the hands of the Widow Hoyle seemed to meet behind his windpipe.

He felt himself dragged across the room, and his last thoughts were that he would retain his presence of mind.

"This is the deepest game I ever saw played!" he said to himself. "Bowery Burt, hunted by the police, can find time to play a red hand of his own. But Floss is safe—thank heaven!"

The next moment he heard a door pulled open.

"In with him!" said the man. Captain Coldgrip was pushed forward by the Amazon of the trap, and the next second he found himself falling through Egyptian darkness—down—down—down!—undoubtedly to death!

Fatal investigation! "I wonder who put him onto my connection with the decoy business?" said Bowery Burt between breaths, as he faced Mrs. Hoyle who had fallen upon a chair almost exhausted.

"Mercy!—Heaven knows!—I'm nearly dead!" gasped the woman.

"By Jericho! I know!" cried the Bowery thug. "I'll bet my head that I can put my hand on the person who gave him the pointer. And I'll proceed to do it, too. There's a million in it. The girl will never give another scheme away!" And Bowery Burt started toward the street.

"Hold! the police want you," cried Mrs. Hoyle. "Don't go out now!"

The answer was an oath, and Bowery Burt was gone.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### POUNCED UPON.

It was not long after these thrilling events, when Helen Hotspur received a piece of news that brightened her eyes.

This gratifying intelligence was imparted by Bowery Burt, who assured her that Captain Coldgrip, the detective, had fallen into a trap from which escape was impossible.

The beautiful adventuress could not keep back an exclamation of joy.

"To-night I astonish Ferg Fowler!" she said. "To-night he sees Frances Percy, the lost heiress, and we make the big strike for the millions."

Bowery Burt looked at her, but said nothing.

"You have no clew yet to the man who carried off the papers and the dragon, I presume?" continued Queen Helen.

"No clew yet," said the Bowery sport with finished coolness.

"I am convinced that Raven Rob came back," Queen Helen went on. "He must have had a suspicion about the hidden door. He will try to play a game of some kind with the proceeds of his second hunt. Who knows but that he may confront the millionaire banker to-day?"

"I hardly think he will."

"The man is a desperado," said Helen quickly.

"If I find his trail, his coolness won't save him," grated Bowery Burt. "Where is Elegant Ahab?"

"Hunting for the thief."

A smile appeared at the corners of Bowery

Burt's lips. He saw that he had completely hoodwinked the woman before him, that she did not dream that he, and not the Raven, had robbed the secret compartment in the wall.

"We'll see about the game you are going to play to-night," he said, under his breath, as he watched her. "I'm not going to put up with anything that looks like interference with the little scheme I have on hand. Captain Coldgrip is out of the way, and the Raven is not likely to interfere. The police are looking for me for strangling Foxy at Papa Pangborn's, but what of that? It isn't the first time I've had the coppers at my heels. If I strike the lead—the proper lead—to-day, Helen, you won't have to make your play to-night."

Bowery Burt was on the street soon after the interview.

He was thoroughly disguised, and did not look like his former self.

For a man wanted for murder he took things extremely easy; he even laughed when he thought how he had escaped from the officer who had come to his house on Chatham street.

Bowery Burt had not been back to the place since his escape. He knew that the premises were apt to be under police surveillance, and he was the last man to poke his head into a trap set for him.

More than once he felt a desire to go back to Papa Pangborn's, for his fingers itched to clutch the throat of the Jew who had reported his crime. He wondered if Papa still inhabited the place, or whether he had been locked up to await his (Bowery Burt's) arrest.

"There's one place I can go to—one play I can make with comparative safety," he said, some time after leaving Helen Hotspur. "I can show Floss that I still run things to suit myself, even if the cops are after me. I was unfortunate to lose the dwarf who gave me the slip at Simon Peters's, but before long I'll choke the weasel till he dies."

He knew where to find Floss, for, as we have seen, he had previously tracked her to Captain Coldgrip's quarters on the Bowery, and thither he bent his steps. Bowery Burt had an eye out for the police, but he reached his destination apparently unobserved, and without hesitation he pushed forward to the door of the detective's room.

"She'll be looking for the ferret," chuckled the Bowery sport, as he rapped at the door, "and so, of course, I'll be immediately admitted."

Just as he had expected, the door was opened in response to his knock, and he confronted Floss, who started back and looked into his face with an expression of astonishment on hers.

There was nothing familiar left about the Bowery sport. His disguise had completely transformed him; his eyebrows had been altered to suit the complexion of the full beard he wore, and the shape of his figure had been changed in some manner.

"Aha! this is the place," ejaculated the villain as he walked into the room.

"Mr. Coldgrip is not at home just now," said Floss.

"So much the better! Please shut the door, girl. I want a few words with you."

Floss's answer suddenly became a half-frightened stare, and before she could frame another sentence Bowery Burt shut the door, locked it, and coolly transferred the key to his own pocket!

This was an act of assurance that seemed to take the girl's breath as well as her color.

Her eyes instantly flashed resentment.

"What does this mean?" she exclaimed.

"A good deal, my girl!" laughed the schemer, leaning forward with the old leer back in his eyes. "Don't you know me yet, Floss?—where are your eyes?"

A sudden change came over him at these words, and Floss seemed to recognize him in the fraction of a second.

"You are Bowery Burt!" she said. "Ah! why didn't I know you before?"

The fellow laughed again.

"I am here on business, Floss, and you know it by this time," he went on. "The game's taken a new shoot within the last forty-eight hours. You never came back to me after I sent you out with that decoy for Captain Coldgrip, the Gotham fox. They ran you in somewhere, did they? You fell into the hands of Foxy and the Raven, eh?"

Floss said "Yes" almost unconsciously.

"The decoy didn't work well," continued Bowery Burt. "Foxy tried to carry out the game which you were to play; but somebody warned the rat. Floss, do you know that the sick man who lodged above us wasn't so sick, after all?"

There was no reply.

"Drake Mowbray, the young wretch, was a spy!" the villain went on, quickly, showing his teeth maliciously. "He had a hole bored in the floor, and there he undoubtedly watched us and listened. You went up to see him pretty often, and you must have become well acquainted. Who is he? I want to know."

"He is Drake Mowbray. I can tell you nothing more," said Floss.

"You mean you won't, eh?" said Bowery

Burt. "Look here, girl! You need not think you are out of my hands because you are domiciled in Captain Coldgrip's quarters. I haven't clothed and fed you for years to see you walk away from me and stay. Where did the man fox find you?"

Floss made an involuntary motion of retreat, but the hand of Bowery Burt darting out like a serpent, closed on her arm.

"You don't get away from me till I say so! By glory, you're worth too much to me to give you up because you don't want to go back to old Chatham street. I am master now, even in the lion's den! Did the captain find you at the Raven?"

"He took me away from Raven Rob, and offered me a home here for the present."

"He did, eh? Why didn't you come back to the old place?" exclaimed Bowery Burt. "I judge it didn't take much coaxing to get you here!"

The girl flushed deeply and her eyes got a new look of resentment.

"I thought I would be safer here than at the house of a man wanted by the police," she said looking into the villain's eyes.

"Wanted by the police?" said Bowery Burt, between his teeth. "Who said so?"

"Captain Coldgrip."

"It's a lie—an infamous lie!" was the response, and the speaker's countenance betrayed the falsehood he uttered. "When I am hunted by the police, I'm not going to walk the streets of New York during the day—not even in a disguise entirely impenetrable. Wanted by the police, am I? You don't believe the story, eh? Floss?"

"You've been wanted before," the girl said, boldly.

"So I have, and I may be wanted again!" was the reply. "But I'm here to see you—to take you to another place."

Floss uttered a light cry of aversion and drew back the length of his arm.

"Not so fast!" cried Bowery Burt, laughing in her face. "You've been with the ferret long enough. I've got a new home for you. It's better than the Chatham street place, but it is not the one you shall have before long. You don't want to make any outcry, girl. I am a tiger when I'm riled, and nobody knows this better than you."

"Why not go back to the old house?" ventured Floss.

"With Drake Mowbray, the spy, to watch us?—not much!" was the response. "Did you let that young man get a hold on your heart, Floss?"

The girl's gaze instantly dropped.

"If he did, by heavens! I'll see to it!" exclaimed Bowery Burt, and Floss felt his fingers tighten at her arm. "I will pick a lover for you when the proper time comes. And it won't be an infernal spy, either! Girl, you don't know what you've run away from. Since you've left me I've made a regular ten-strike; I've got certain things in my hands that'll make the outcome sure. You want to go with me. The paid ferret who fetched you here will never carry out one of his schemes. He can't run anybody down. Captain Coldgrip isn't worth a dead dog at this moment! You want to go with me, I say. Even if the police want me, they will never find me. I've got a thousand hiding-places at my command in Gotham. Elegant Ahab and Queen Helen may fail with the Dragon League game; but I can't fail with mine; it's impossible!"

The girl thought she saw a look of triumph in Bowery Burt's eyes.

"We'll go now," he went on. "It isn't necessary to leave a note for the captain. If he should come back—which is very doubtful—he will be shrewd enough to guess what has happened. Yes, Floss, we are going down on the street. It is broad daylight and the Bowery is thronged. You don't want to give any alarm; you want to keep at my side, mum as an oyster. The first motion of betrayal will end this game quicker than you think. I ran risk in coming here, and I take more in going away. A while ago you were head over ears into what we call the Dragon League scheme; you have longed to see the diamond dragon. I can show it to you inside of an hour, but if you attempt to give me the slip, or intimate to the cops that I am Bowery Burt, you shall never see it—never. Put on your hat, and come with me."

The girl went to the bed and picked up the hood she had worn to the detective's room.

"My God! have I fallen back into the hands of this villain for good?" she mentally ejaculated. "How did he ferret me out here? And what has become of Captain Coldgrip? I see that I am worth something to Bowery Burt—Drake Mowbray was not mistaken when he told me that Burt's story of my parentage could not be true. I dare not refuse to obey him now. I know what will happen if I openly betray him on the street, so I will not attempt it. In some manner I am connected with the mystery of the diamond dragon, and Bowery Burt knows it."

All this time the man was watching Floss with the eyes of a hawk.

She seemed to be fighting for time in the precise manner in which she adjusted her hood. She was hoping that a little delay might bring

Captain Coldgrip upon the scene; but at that moment the detective was in the last trap that had caught him.

Bowery Burt took her hand when he led her from the warm room down the stair and out into the cold street.

Once he gave her a fierce, admonishing look, and his lips said in a whisper:

"Remember! if I am betrayed, you'll die as Floss of Chatham street!"

Then he quickened his gait, and the two passed down the Bowery, the girl breathless and in his grasp, and Bowery Burt with a pair of keen eyes that seemed to see everything.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

##### THE LOST DETECTIVE.

WE are forced by circumstances to return to one of the man-traps of the great city.

If the reader had passed Mrs. Hoyle's little confectionery shortly after the events which have been detailed in a preceding chapter, he would have found the Amazonian proprietress in her accustomed place, as if nothing out of the common run of things had transpired.

Floss had not suspected the Widow Hoyle wrongly, and Captain Coldgrip had discovered that she kept more than a small candy store "on Houston, below Broadway."

Mrs. Hoyle had composed herself as best she could since her part in the trapping of the New York sleuth; but more than once while in her old seat, she cast anxious glances toward "the cupboard," as if she had some misgivings as to Coldgrip's fate.

In truth Hannah Hoyle was completely under Bowery Burt's thumb, and when he went to her and laid bare his plans to "catch the old fox," she knew that a remonstrance would call forth language she did not want to hear.

Naturally not very honest, Mrs. Hoyle had fallen into Bowery Burt's clutches, and he had used her on several occasions to further certain criminal ends of his own. She feared to see the Bowery thief leave her in the light of open day, as he had told her that the police wanted him, for she believed that, if arrested, he might implicate her in some confession.

At the same time she did not like to have him on her premises, for his arrest there would bring her establishment into disrepute, and perhaps lead to the discovery of the trap into which the detective had been thrown.

It was, therefore, with some uneasiness not openly manifested that Mrs. Hoyle sat in her usual place after Bowery Burt's departure and waited on the few customers who dropped in.

Several hours passed away and she began to feel safe.

"I wonder," she said to herself—"I wonder if the fall did do the work for him. Since I am into it, I don't want it half-done. I can't afford to have it that way."

She left the shop and entered the semi-darkness of the ice-cream parlor.

At that time of year she had few customers for that delicacy, and the little room, therefore, was empty.

Mrs. Hoyle drew the curtains close behind her and went to the door, which she had opened for a certain purpose a short time before.

The next moment she was listening at the dark entrance of the trap.

"It's stiller than the grave down there," she said. "I guess we will have no trouble with that secret cop. Captain Coldgrip he was—one of the best street sleuths of New York, and the only man Bowery Burt professes to fear. I never liked him myself, though he never came here before. It is good-by forever, Captain Coldgrip. If no friend saw you enter my shop, the secret of your end is safe. When Bowery Burt makes the million he is after, I'll realize something for my help."

She shut the door softly, fixed the button, and was about to go back into her shop when the front door opened and shut.

A moment later Mrs. Hoyle parted the curtains and was greeted by two men, one a fine-looking and well-built young person of twenty-two, and the other a dark-skinned man considerably below the usual height and with the look and shape of a dwarf.

"Ho! here's our Amazonian Queen!" laughed the dwarf, at sight of the widow.

Mrs. Hoyle appeared to smile at the compliment, and came down the aisle behind the counter to her chair.

"What is it, gentlemen?" she asked, looking at the two companions. "What can I do for you in my line?"

"My name is Mowbray," said the youngest of the men—the youth mentioned. "This person is Mr. Dado."

Mrs. Hoyle started slightly at sound of the dwarf's name, for on several occasions she had heard it spoken by Bowery Burt, and in a manner which left no doubt that the little man was not his friend.

"Duke Dado, my giantess!" laughed the dwarf. "You will pardon this visit, as it was not made to purchase your wares. We want to look through your house—that is all."

Despite her efforts to remain calm, the widow was seen to start and to change color.

"Through my house?" she echoed. "What do you belong to the police?"

"No."

"Then I must refuse any such request." And Mrs. Hannah Hoyle grew bold as she proceeded. "What have I, a lone and honest widow, done that my house must be searched? Are you detectives?"

"No again, madam," smiled the dwarf, "that is, we don't belong to the Mulberry street force. We want to look through your house—"

"What for?" demanded the widow.

Duke Dado leaned forward, his hands resting on the counter, and his keen eyes fixed upon the shopkeeper.

"We're looking for a man," he said.

Mrs. Hoyle crimsoned.

"Don't get red," continued the dwarf with a laugh. "I happen to know that the man we want came here not long ago, and that he hasn't been seen to leave. You live back of your shop, I believe?"

"If I do I'm not going to have my apartments ransacked," was the reply.

"They shall not be," said young Mowbray. "If we find nothing, the search will not be repeated. If we are not satisfied, I tell you we will be followed by the police."

This seemed to put a damper on Mrs. Hoyle's indignation.

"Better let these men go ahead," she said to herself. "They know nothing about my house, and I will risk their finding the man in the cupboard."

"If I am to be searched, I beg of you not to disturb anything," she said cooling down. "And I would like to know for whom you are looking."

"Ah! would you, Mrs. Hoyle?" said Duke Dado. "We are looking for a person of some importance just now. He is called Captain Coldgrip."

"Who is he?" asked the widow.

"An important man when men like Bowery Burt play a game of crime," was the answer.

"You look for a man I don't know, therefore, since you have mentioned him, you are welcome to search my house, only I don't like to be under suspicion. There is my house, beyond the cream parlor. I can't leave my shop to guide you; but you can find all the rooms and the cellar without any trouble."

Mrs. Hoyle's manner did not seem to hoodwink the dwarf and his companion.

Young Mowbray's eyes looked at her sharply while she spoke, and Duke Dado drummed on the counter with the ends of his fingers.

"You can lock the door of your shop, madame," the dwarf said. "Your business won't suffer by a few minutes' absence. We want you along."

"I could throw that insidious atom into the street!" grated the widow. "If he saw Captain Coldgrip enter my shop, and has watched it ever since, he knows he never left it. I curse the day I ever got under Bowery Burt's hand. If I get out of this trouble, I'll never fall into another."

"I'll accommodate you," she said to the two men, and then she came around the counter and locked the door.

She led them into the ice-cream parlor, where she turned on the gas, and waved her hand around the room.

"This is nothing but a parlor for ladies and gents, used only through the summer," she said. "You can look under the tables and chairs if you like; there's an old sofa in the corner, too."

The paper on the walls was dark, and the catch of the fatal cupboard came in one of the most somber places, and was not easily seen.

"Nothing here for you, I guess," continued Mrs. Hoyle. "We'll go to the other part of the house."

Duke Dado and Mowbray made no remonstrance, and the widow, only too eager, led them to a door which opened from the ice-cream parlor into the humble back building which she occupied.

She conducted the two persons into a small room which looked innocent enough, and thence into another, her own sleeping apartment. After an inspection of these rooms she led them to the cellar, which contained nothing.

"That is all," she said, wheeling upon the hunters with a triumphant gleam in her eyes. "You have seen every foot of space I have to show, and I trust you see that you have subjected a poor widow to unjust suspicions."

"I am very sorry," said Mowbray; "but justice demanded that this search should be made."

"And justice demands that Captain Coldgrip shall be found!" said the dwarf in a startling voice. "I know a good deal about the man-traps of New York. I know that more than a score of them are at Bowery Burt's command, and that he makes no acquaintances for nothing. He is your friend, Mrs. Hoyle; he has been so for years; you will not tell me that Bowery Burt has not received help from you at various times."

"My God! I am no thief's pal!" cried the widow.

"What else are you, then?" exclaimed Duke Dado, his little figure seeming to grow an inch as he covered the woman with his sallow finger.

"I have not threaded New York night after night for nothing. I used to know London like a book, and I make it a point to know everybody of the city where I live. You don't want to tell me that you don't know Bowery Burt, nor that you have never been of service to him. He was here to-day; so was Captain Claude Coldgrip of the secret police. Will you please look into my face, Mrs. Hoyle, and tell me before your Maker that this is not true?"

The widow tried to avoid the piercing eyes of Duke Dado, the dwarf.

"Don't flinch, my black-eyed Amazon!" continued Dado. "Watch her, Mowbray! She is going to declare the solid truth in the presence of the All-Seeing Eye!"

Mrs. Hoyle was now a striking example of a guilty person confronted by her crime. She tried to reply but her voice grew thick, and her eyes got a sudden stare.

"Out with it, madame!" cried the atom. "Look me in the eye while you talk, please. We'll be satisfied with the truth. Ah! what ails you, Mrs. Hoyle?"

The Amazon was actually staggering from the two men with a face that was terrible to behold.

"He—made—me help—him!" she gasped, and then with a singular sound between a cry and a groan, she fell in a heap at the foot of the cellar wall!

Mowbray and Duke Dado exchanged quick looks.

"The detective is somewhere on the premises," said the dwarf. "Mrs. Hoyle is in a faint and can't help us for some time. We have overlooked Captain Coldgrip. We must go back over the trail."

They did so, leaving the Amazon in the dark cellar. They went back into the house and searched the rooms closely; but their work had no reward.

"Try the shop again," said young Mowbray.

The next moment they passed into the confectionery, and were about to subject it to a scrutiny for concealed trap-doors, when a man appeared at the front entrance.

The dwarf gave vent to a sharp exclamation at sight of the furred cap and bearded face.

"It is Bowery Burt!" he said, starting toward the door. "The villain has come back here for a purpose!"

Bowery Burt disappeared before Duke Dado could reach the entrance.

"Follow him," the dwarf said to Mowbray. "Don't lose sight of that man for a moment! He may have found Floss, and you must keep him in sight. I am capable of continuing the search here. You will report at the old quarters as soon as possible."

The door opened and Mowbray rushed out.

"Now I'll finish up this job," said Duke Dado to himself. "I'm not going to leave here till I know what has become of detective Coldgrip. The woman in the cellar is safe for the present. We may not be able to beat the Dragon League without Captain Claude. He must be found!" And the dwarf walked back into the ice-cream parlor.

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### CALLED ON FOR CASH.

At almost the same moment a man who had been walking fast for some time went nimbly up the steps of Ferguson Fowler's elegant home, and lifted the knocker.

He was a well built and not bad looking man of nearly forty; his clothes were good, though not the product of a fashionable tailor, and under the rather wide brimmed hat he wore, were two eyes that had a mischievous and malicious twinkle.

The person who opened the door looked at the visitor cautiously, but did not ask him to enter.

"Is Mr. Fowler in?" asked the man on the step, at the same time displaying a card on which was the name of "Robert Randolph" in bold letters.

"I'm here on business," continued the man to the servant. "You may add something of this sort when you hand your master my card."

The next moment Robert Randolph was waiting to be admitted.

Since we last saw the millionaire banker he had kept his house pretty closely.

There were new lines on his face, and his eyes seemed to have retreated further into the depths of his sockets.

Only once or twice since his recovery from the effects of Elegant Ahab's poisoned pastille had he been seen at his Wall street office, and then only for a few minutes.

The work of the Dragon League seemed to hang over the millionaire-banker like a cloud of doom.

It is true that Captain Coldgrip had been at work but a short time, but each minute had been hours to Ferg Fowler, and the anxiety had left its traces behind.

The threat of Elegant Ahab to restore the supposed dead heir of the Percy estate had had its effect; and so had a threat more dire than that.

Ferg Fowler got the look of a desperate man as the hours wore on.

Why didn't Captain Coldgrip find the Dragon League at once? What was he a detective for if he could not run the gang down immediately and save the millions to Nydia, his ward?

Fowler even thought that the detective was playing him false, and more than once he was on the eve of trying some other man-fox.

But Nydia, who was a beautiful young woman with a clear complexion and lustrous black eyes, always came to the detective's rescue when the banker mentioned his resolves.

"Give Captain Coldgrip a chance," the girl would say. "Let him go on until he comes and reports no success. He never fails. Keep the man in your employ till he proves himself incapable of doing your work."

"You don't know what he said to me when he was last here," said Ferg Fowler on one of these occasions.

"No," said Nydia.

"He asked me what he should do if he found Frances Percy."

"Why, I thought she was dead!" exclaimed the girl.

"Dead, she is!" was the reply.

"Haven't I the letter written by Mary May Cable, her nurse who died in Manchester? I showed him that letter, yet he shook his head."

Nydia was silent for a moment.

"Well, what did you tell Captain Coldgrip?" she asked.

"What any man would have told him under the circumstances. I said there was no Frances Percy, excepting some false one whom the League may attempt to produce," was the reply. "They dare not bring such a woman here! Do you think they dare, Nydia?"

"I don't know," said the beautiful girl. "If the man who burned the deadly pastilles in this house is the head of the plot, I shall not be surprised at anything."

"Then, you expect—"

The millionaire's sentence was broken by the tones of the knocker and a sudden pallor overspread his face.

"Go to your room, Nydia," he said. "It may be some important visitor who must see me in private."

The girl retired and the servant brought in a card bearing the name of "Robert Randolph."

"He says his business is so important that he must see you," added the porter.

"What does he look like, Jason?" asked Fowler.

"Oh, he's not a bad looking man," said the servant.

"Does he look anything like this cool demon, Mortimer Nogg?"

"Not a bit, sir."

Ferguson Fowler leaned back in his chair and seemed to prepare himself for some ordeal.

"Admit him," he said to the porter, and when the man had retired he turned his head and watched the door leading from the hall.

In a little while he heard a soft, almost cat-like step, and a moment later his visitor stood before him.

Fowler noticed that Robert Randolph closed the door firmly behind him, and also that he had a gliding motion as he came forward.

There was a gleam of intense triumph in the visitor's eyes, which took in the luxurious appointments of the room, as well as the pale and anxious man in the chair.

"I don't like him," was Fowler's mental conclusion, when he had looked the man over from head to foot. "My God! I would give a thousand if I had not told Jason to admit him."

But he was there, and it was now too late to recall the command.

"Be seated," said the gold king, though the words cost him a pang. "You come here on important business, I believe?"

"Yes, on important business," said the man, slightly emphasizing the finish of his sentence. "I believe I haven't met you for a long time."

"When did we ever meet?" asked Fowler.

"Ah! you have forgotten it, no doubt!" and Randolph smiled like a hyena shows his teeth. "It was in England, on the road between London and Oak Meadows. Major Pe cy's estate."

Ferg Fowler seemed about to start from his chair, but he tried to control himself by a mighty effort.

"Another money leech," he said to himself, and then he looked at the man who was enjoying the effects of his bomb.

"Your memory is better than mine," Fowler said.

"It oughtn't to be, seein' what you have to remember," was the retort. "Shall I tell you just where I happened to meet you? Do you want me to name the year, the night, and the hour?"

"It isn't necessary," and Fowler waved his hand impatiently. "I am willing to take your word for the statement that we may have met before to-night."

"All right," said Randolph, with a smile. "I want a little money, Mr. Fowler."

"Money?" echoed the Wall street nabob.

"The root of all evil!" said the man. "My card told you simply that I am Robert Randolph. I have a nick-name which is known in two worlds. I am sometimes called the Raven—a very appropriate name, you think no

doubt, as I want to drop my beak into your money-chest. I want money, as I've said before—not very much, for I'm a man with few wants. I am here for twenty thousand dollars."

Ferg Fowler gave utterance to a quick exclamation of surprise.

"You want to break me up?" he ejaculated. "Great God! man, think of the enormity of the sum you want. Twenty thousand dollars! It is more than I have made in Wall street in ten years."

"But nothing like the sum you made the night you rode between Oak Meadows and London!" hissed the Raven, leaning forward and dropping one of his velvety hands upon Fowler's knee. "Come, sir. This is the natural result of the game played in the queen's country a few years ago. I want the sum I have named, not a dollar less! I shall stay here till I get it, or until, by your refusal to accommodate me, you force me to play a hand that'll astonish all Gotham."

"What is that?"

"I will merely introduce to you a young girl at whose command you will walk out of this house—a beggar."

A strange light came suddenly into Fowler's eyes: it looked like a gleam of defiance.

"This is an old game," he said, with a show of boldness. "I know what you mean. You threaten to produce Frances Percy, the child who died in Manchester some time after her father's suicide. I have been threatened thus before."

"By whom?"

"By your captain, I should say."

The Raven broke out into a laugh.

"I don't b'long to the Dragon League!" he exclaimed. "I have no connection with that beautiful gang. I'm an independent player, now that my pard has cashed his last chips at death's counter. You don't connect me with Elegant Ahab and company! Oh, no! I can do what I threaten. I can produce Frances Percy within six hours. I know that she carries the tattooed dragon on her arm—the same one mentioned by the English papers after she disappeared with her nurse following her father's death—suicide you call it, I believe. Ha! ha! ha!"

The soul of a devil seemed to laugh in Raven Rob's cachinnation.

Ferg Fowler looked at him with eyes that longed to possess the power to kill with a glance.

"Mebbe," said the Raven continuing suddenly, "Mebbe, you'd give the twenty thousand for the girl."

"Is she in New York?"

"No questions, and no lies!" was the answer. "Is it a bargain, Mr. Fowler? Am I to have twenty thousand for Frances Percy delivered here?"

"When?"

"Within six hours, if it suits you."

"But don't you know that the courts have declared the girl dead?"

"To Satan with the courts!" cried the Raven. "I know that Mary May Cable, the child's nurse, died in Manchester; but I have the child herself, I say. You can believe it or not, just as you please. I can proclaim that on a certain night of a certain year, a certain man passed along a certain road in England; that the next day Major Percy was found at his country seat, dead, a revolver in his hand, a bullet in his brain; that his estate by will fell to the certain night rider who now enjoys it as Ferguson Fowler of New York. I ask twenty thousand dollars to-night. I need the money. You might call this levying blackmail. I don't care what you call it. If Elegant Ahab of the Dragon League told you that he can produce Frances Percy he lies like a thief! I am the only person who can produce her—I, the Raven."

Ferguson Fowler could not take his eyes from the man while he spoke.

"I'd give a thousand if I could put Captain Coldgrip on this fellow's track," he ejaculated mentally. "Has he really got the girl? Or, is all this a game of his own for gold? What does he know about the man who rode from the Oak Meadows to London the night he talks about? I fear I must compromise the case, and then by the eternal heavens! I'll have him run down!"

Ferg Fowler leaned forward and opened one of the drawers of his writing-desk.

"No check," said the Raven with a grin. "I don't want to present my face at any of your city banks. I want the cash! You rich men have secret marks on your checks which tell your bankers to refuse payment, or to hold the bearer for the police. I'm an old bird, Ferg Fowler. I've lost a good deal of my youthful plumage, but chaff doesn't catch me. There's a treasury behind you: the sum is there."

The millionaire bit his lip and glanced madly at the cool fellow, then he wheeled his chair toward the safe.

The next minute he had opened the door and taken out a big roll of bills.

"I accede to your demands on one condition," he said.

"Well, what's that?"

"That you produce the girl you call Frances

Percy at my down-town office at ten o'clock tomorrow."

A smile appeared suddenly at the Raven's mouth.

"And find you there with a blue-coat and handcuffs? Oh, no, Mr. Fowler!" he said. "I'll take the money now on no conditions."

The millionaire drew back.

It was clearly to be seen that a brilliant scheme of some kind had failed.

"Count it out," continued Raven Rob.

"Count it out, I say, or put it back, and let me play a hand that'll make Gotham open its eyes! You don't want to fool with the man who saw you on the road between London and Oak Meadows. This hand is distinctly my own. It is a better one than Queen Helen and Elegant Ahab will ever play. Am I to have the cash? I can't stay all day, sir!" and the man got up and took his hat.

"I'll beat him before night!" said the millionaire under his breath, and then he counted out a lot of large notes.

"Here is your blood-money. We are quits forever!" he cried, tossing the roll of bills toward the Raven, who caught them dexterously.

"Now, sir, keep clear of me!"

The villain laughed and crushed the notes into his pocket.

"Keep clear of you, eh?" he cried. "So I will, Ferg Fowler; so I will—while the boddle lasts!"

And then the shutting of a door told the banker that he was alone.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### OUT OF THE MAN-TRAP.

WE must not lose sight of the New York detective, the man we saw last falling down through the dark depths of Mrs. Hoyle's "cupboard."

Captain Coldgrip, though well choked by Bowery Burt and the Amazon in the struggle in the confectionery, was by no means unconscious when the door of the trap was opened and he was thrust inside.

In an instant he found himself falling through space, but he had presence of mind enough to throw out his hand in the hope of catching something that would break the terrible descent.

Once or twice he touched objects that seemed to be stones, but he could not grasp them.

However, they broke his fall, and when he struck he found himself in a walled space which suggested the bottom of a dry well.

After all, he had not fallen headlong with that awful rapidity expected, and when he recovered he found that, thanks to the narrowness of the pit, no bones had been broken.

"This is one of the traps I did not know anything about," the detective said to himself.

"Mrs. Hoyle keeps an elegant shop, sure enough, and Bowery Burt has her under his thumb. The Dragon League is at work in earnest, just now, and the plotters intended that I shall never report to Ferg Fowler. We will see about that hereafter."

It was not the detective's intention to remain a moment longer than he had in the infamous man-trap.

He believed he was at the bottom of an old well which had been dry a long time, and his first thought was to get out.

"There'll be a surprise in your little candy-shop if I get up, Madame Hoyle!" he exclaimed.

"You may wish that you had never sent the letter to my quarters. This is one of the liveliest trials of my experience, and I can safely say that the end is not yet."

Captain Coldgrip found the walls of his prison comparatively smooth.

He could find no purchase for his hands, and after some hard work he was forced to desist, but not from despair. This was a state of mind unknown to the city ferret.

He imagined Bowery Burt and the widow congratulating one another over the success of their scheme, and it took no stretch of the imagination to see the Bowery thug report to Elegant Ahab and Queen Helen.

In his short hunt for the Dragon League, the detective had discovered that Mortimer Nogg, the man with the pastilles, was Elegant Ahab, and this discovery had been followed by the unearthing of Helen Hotspur, the cool Cleopatra of the gigantic game. What if they should make their great play while he was forced to keep the prison into which he had been thrown? What if the Raven should rediscover Floss, or Bowery Burt himself find the girl?

Thoughts like these set the detective at work again, but with the same result—he could not rise above a certain height.

We need not detail the repeated efforts made in the darkness.

Again and again he failed, only to renew the attempt and to fall back to the bottom of the pit with curses for the villainous pair who had entrapped him.

By the merest chance he had escaped death, but what was that chance worth if he could not leave his prison?

Claude Coldgrip had been in several traps before, but this one was the most perplexing; the

trap sprung on him in Papa Pangborn's house was not as terrible.

At last the New York sleuth desisted, and leaned against the wall to think and recuperate. "I must stretch my wits," he said, half aloud. "By the eternal stars! this place shall not hold me! I am going to get out, for I must. I have too much at stake to die here by the hands of Bowery Burt and Mrs. Hoyle, the Amazon. I have sworn to run the Dragon League to earth, and I shall do it. I have also taken a private oath of another kind, and it, too, must be fulfilled!"

After awhile, and all at once, a sound above the detective attracted his attention. It was a noise like the opening of a door that did not yield readily. Captain Coldgrip looked up; all was darkness.

"By Jove! there's a hole here," he heard a far-away voice say, and the words were followed by a strange stillness.

The sound went through the man-ferret like a thrill.

"That isn't the vixen's voice, nor the man's!" he exclaimed, as he waited for something else. "I don't know of any one who saw me enter the candy store, but somebody is overhead—somebody who has just made an unexpected discovery."

In a little while a light flashed amid the darkness above, and the next moment it came down—down until it fell blazing at the detective's feet—a bit of paper that illumined the bottom of his cell while it burned.

"Jehu! it's a long way down there!" said the voice he had heard awhile before. "I'll try my voice." And then the lost detective heard some one call him:

"Hello! Captain Claude! Are you down there, dead or alive? Hello—hello!"

No enemy would make such a call as that.

The detective uttered a cry of joy.

"I am here!" he said strongly, sending his voice up the shaft. "I am here, and uninjured, thank heaven!"

He heard the person above utter an ejaculation of profound surprise.

"You must be a rubber ball, Captain Claude," said the friendly voice. "Can't you come up?"

"No. I wouldn't be here now if the walls had given me a purchase," was the reply.

"Would a rope help you?"

"It would deliver me."

"Wait a minute."

"By Jove! with that somebody up there, I can wait an hour," said the captain.

If he could have seen to the top of his circular prison he would have noticed a little man leave the edge of the well and spring back into Mrs. Hoyle's confectionery.

It was our fugitive acquaintance, Duke Dado, and he was on hunt of a rope long enough to reach the man in the well.

Hither and thither he ran with his eyes on the alert. He looked under the counter and behind the shelves—everywhere but no rope.

"I'd strip the Amazon's bed for a rope if I thought she didn't enjoy the luxury of patent springs!" he exclaimed. "Just now, of all things, I want a rope and so does Captain Claude, the Gotham ferret."

But the confectionery had nothing for him beyond its meager stock of sweetmeats, and Dado grew furious.

Mowbray had gone off on the trail of Bowery Burt, as we already know, and was not by to make any suggestions, and Mrs. Hoyle, so far as he knew, had not recovered from her swoon in the cellar.

In the midst of his dilemma the dwarf rushed to the front door and out upon the street. He was not gone more than ten minutes when he came back with something under his coat.

In the ice-cream parlor which he sought at once, this something resolved itself into a stout rope of good length.

"The rope is here!" he said, talking down the pit to the unseen man, and then he began to fasten one end of it to one of the joists of the false cupboard.

Duke Dado had taken pains to lock the front door when he came back.

He did not care how much Mrs. Hoyle's business suffered. The candies would keep and the proprietress would find herself in luck if she did not see the inside of Sing Sing.

When Duke Dado had made the rope fast to the joist he lowered it into the pit and played it out rapidly.

If he had looked up from his work toward the door that led into Mrs. Hoyle's house he would have seen a hideous face and two tigress eyes watching him. These would have told him that the Houston street Amazon had come back from the cellar, and that she was watching his every movement.

Mrs. Hoyle evidently knew or guessed that the dwarf had the agility of the cat, and that his quick ears would detect her heavy tread in the room.

She might have covered the distance between them by a single bound, but she was afraid to risk it, even though the millionaire's runaway dwarf would, in a certain sense, have been as a child in her hands.

So she stood with the door slightly ajar and

continued to regard Duke Dado with eyes that appeared to blaze, so fierce they were.

The dwarf worked on until the rope hung down the shaft.

"All's ready now, Captain Claude," he exclaimed. "The rope is taut and solid up here. Run up the cord like a squirrel, and we'll show the gang that man-traps don't hold all the time."

An exclamation of satisfaction came up from below and a moment later the swaying rope told Dado that a man was on it working his way up from his living grave.

Mrs. Hoyle kept her eyes on the dwarf as if she knew what was going on.

She had an intense curiosity to know whether Captain Coldgrip had been preserved after his fall down the pit.

"If Satan did help his own, this is no longer any place for me," she said in an undertone. "They will pounce upon me and drag me before the courts for trying to take human life. My little shop will have to be given up. I will have to get out of the city. Bowery Burt, all this is your work! I curse the day I first met you. Ah! somebody is almost at the top of the cupboard. Heavens! can it really be Captain Claude Coldgrip?"

She leaned forward in her eagerness to see what would take place next for Duke Dado had drawn back from the entrance to the pit, and seemed ready to welcome somebody.

"It is he!" almost gasped the widow, and then the well-known features of the Gotham detective came into view.

"Oh! I owe this assistance to you, do I?" cried Captain Coldgrip catching sight of his dwarfed deliverer before he was wholly out of the pit.

"To Mowbray and me, sir," said Duke Dado.

"Mowbray? where is he?"

"Gone after Bowery Burt," was the reply.

"And Mrs. Hoyle?"

The widow drew back at this question.

"We left her in the cellar in a faint!" laughed the dwarf. "She couldn't look me in the eye and say she hadn't helped you into a trap."

Captain Coldgrip was out of the trap at last, and as he stood in the light of the gas his eyes seemed to snap for vengeance.

"This is a good turn, Duke Dado," he said wheeling upon the dwarf who seemed proud of his great work. "I'll try and do one for you some day."

"If I get into a trap like this, eh, Captain Claude?" laughed the dwarf. "I wanted to get you out of durance the worst kind. I guess they're going to play the big hand very soon—to-night, mebbe."

"How do you know?"

"I had a right good ride last night under a carriage, and I heard a good deal of important talk on the inside. Queen Helen is impatient. She is going to play her great hand. What it will be you can guess, if you have got into the merits of the diamond dragon case. Elegant Ahab is ready to help her through. Bowery Burt wants a little more time—for a game of his own, I have an idea. Mowbray will run him down I hope, but he may give him the slip."

"I am ready for the contest, Dado," said Captain Claude. "All I want to know first is that Floss is safe where I left her."

"At your rooms, captain?"

"Yes."

"Well, she isn't there."

"Not there, do you say?" exclaimed the detective. "How do you know?"

"Mowbray and I visited there before we came here. But look at the front door, captain—look furtively—don't let the man see you!"

The detective turned his head and glanced between the curtains toward the street.

A man was at the door.

"The fox has doubled on Mowbray," whispered the dwarf. "That man is Elegant Ahab's right bower—Bowery Burt! Ah! there he goes again!"

"Come!" said the detective, rushing forward. "He sha'n't elude me!"

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### THE COLDGRIP PLAY.

It was very important that Captain Coldgrip should keep Bowery Burt in sight.

The knowledge that Floss was no longer at his quarters in the Bowery had filled him with terrible suspicions, heightened by the sudden appearance of Elegant Ahab's right bower at Mrs. Hoyle's shop door.

The city sleuth had not forgotten the part played by Bowery Burt in the springing of the cupboard trap which, by the merest chance, had not cost him his life, and he was anxious to run the villain down as soon as possible.

"This man is really more dangerous than Elegant Ahab and his pastilles," Captain Coldgrip said to himself. "He is of a lower order of criminals and will stoop to anything to gain his ends. With Bowery Burt in my hands, I will agree to play the game out in a short time."

But the next thing to be done was to find the Bowery plotter.

When the detective reached the street with some of the grime of Mrs. Hoyle's "cupboard" still on his garments, Bowery Burt seemed to

have vanished like a ghost, and Captain Claude appeared nonplussed for a moment.

"He went toward Broadway, captain," said Duke Dado, who had followed him from the shop. "Ah! that weasel is a sleek one. Elegant Ahab must have known him thoroughly when he called him to his aid."

The ferret did not stop to hear the dwarf through, for he sprung forward, and the next moment he was himself again—a sleuth-hound on the trail.

Bowery Burt had discovered that Mrs. Hoyle's door was locked from the inside, and he knew that it would not do for him to try to call the proprietress of the trap into the shop, for he was still hunted by the police for the strangling of Foxy at Papa Pangborn's.

Without seeing Captain Coldgrip and the dwarf beyond the door, the villain turned away and proceeded to make himself scarce. He had already eluded Mowbray, the young man recently upon his track, and by a well-learned system of doubling had reappeared at the widow's eager to learn what her two visitors wanted.

Bowery Burt seemed to lose himself in the whirl of Broadway.

He did not look like his old self, and the ardent police were not likely to arrest him for the murder of Foxy, Raven Rob's pard.

If he had looked back he might have seen the man who was pressing forward on the hunt, and he would have uttered an exclamation of surprise, for he had seen his tracker pushed into the dark recesses of Mrs. Hoyle's cupboard.

"Mebbe I'd better go back and see how Floss gets along," suddenly ejaculated Bowery Burt.

"The girl is worth her weight in greenbacks to me, and I can't afford to let her slip now. Helen and Ahab propose to make their big play to-night, but what will it amount to if I have Floss in my hands? Ferg Fowler, the millionaire, may show his teeth at them, and even laugh at the tattoo on Helen's arm, but, by glory! he'll look different when I present my trumps!"

Bowery Burt turned and walked south on Broadway.

He no longer thought of Mowbray, and Captain Coldgrip was entirely out of his mind.

He wondered occasionally how Mrs. Hoyle was getting along, and why her door was locked when he went back the second time.

The shrewd villain kept on till he reached Grand street, when he turned abruptly toward the East River.

More than once he glanced back over his shoulder now. He seemed to be near some important place where he did not want to be seen.

All at once he turned into a narrow alley, dark despite the brilliant morning, and soon afterward darted into a hallway and was lost to view.

Bowery Burt was soon on the second floor of a dingy brick building, and in a moment he had inserted a key into a lock.

As he opened the door before him he uttered an ejaculation of surprise and stood still.

The room was empty!

For a moment the astonished rascal looked like a person who had been suddenly deprived of his senses; his look was a stare, and his face was white.

"In Satan's name, where is Floss?" he exclaimed, and then a bound took him to the middle of the room. "I fetched her here after I lifted her from the detective's nest. I left her locked up in this very room when I went away, and the door was locked when I came back."

He went to the one window of the room and saw that it was still fastened on the inside. He opened a small closet at one side of the apartment and explored it thoroughly, but Floss was not found.

"It takes the wind completely out of my sails," said Bowery Burt, sinking upon a chair with the air of a person completely beaten. "Who could have tracked me? Mowbray? No!—Duke Dado!—I can't believe it. The Raven?—ah! I did not think of him!"

He sprung up with an oath.

"If you are playing a hand against me, Mr. Raven, I'll meet you with your own weapons," he cried. "If Floss has been transferred to your clutches, I'll get her back and show you the coldest deck you ever saw! Even if I don't find the girl before night, I'll see that Helen's 'hand' amounts to nothing. If I do belong to the Dragon League, I'm not going to let Elegant Ahab and the American Cleopatra rake in the stakes. They think me a tool who will put up with a few thousands of the bonanza. I want more than that. I intend to handle millions, and I'll do it when I get Floss fairly back into my hands."

Bowery Burt was not disposed to remain in the vacant room.

Floss was gone, and there was no help for it.

He was confident that she had not effected her escape unaided, and by some kind of reasoning he was inclined to believe that the subtle hand of Raven Rob was in the play.

He shut the door, locked it, and went down in no good humor.

"If I hadn't held Foxy's throat a little too

long, I could have taken her to Papa Pangborn's," he said to himself. "The old Jew got frightened with a dead man in his house, and so he gave me away, and set the cops on my heels. But the street lynxes haven't caught me yet, and I don't think they will!"

Bowery Burt walked from the alley and struck the street with no well-defined plan in his mind.

The disappearance of Floss confused him. He was anxious to find her, and he had to keep an eye on the police.

"Ab! here we are!" said a voice at his side with a suddenness that was startling.

Bowery Burt wheeled upon the speaker and caught the flashes of two eyes in an instant.

"You don't want to run away," continued the same voice. "The kind of traps they have at Mrs. Hoyle's don't amount to anything. You are Bowery Burt and you know me, I see."

Yes, the Bowery villain knew the man who stood at his side. There was but one pair of eyes like his in all New York, and they belonged to Captain Coldgrip!

The surprise of the sudden meeting almost took Burt's breath. Where had this man-fox come from? And when did he strike the trail?

"We'll go back to your house," continued the detective, looking sternly into Bowery Burt's eyes. "You will not attempt to escape. I lost you for awhile on Broadway, ha, ha! but I soon picked you up again. Come! we will go back."

Bowery Burt looked again into the detective's eyes, and turned sullenly into the alley.

"This man *must* be got rid of or the game will never be won!" he ejaculated. "Falling into a bottomless pit doesn't finish him, so I must try another play. Yes, I'll go back with you, Claude Coldgrip, but I serve notice now that I will turn on you at the first opportunity."

Watched closely by the detective, the Bowery sport walked back to the house he had just left. He led the way up-stairs and opened the door of Floss's late prison.

Captain Coldgrip seemed to read the situation at a glance.

"Floss is gone, captain," said Bowery Burt, looking at the detective with a smile.

"When did she go?"

"Hang me if I know; she wasn't here long."

"You took her from my rooms?"

"Yes, I took her, as I had a right ter!" snapped Bowery Burt boldly. "The girl b'longs to me. I've clothed and fed her ever since she was a child."

"That is what I want to know," said the detective to himself, and then he motioned the Bowery sport to a chair.

"Where did you get Floss?" he asked.

There was no reply and the lips of Bowery Burt seemed to meet in a tighter embrace.

"Silence will do you no good," resumed Captain Claude. "I know a good deal about Floss."

"Why ask me anything, then?" was the retort.

The man ferret smiled.

"I asked you where you first got Floss," he said, wondering whether he would receive a civil answer.

"What's the information worth, captain?" grinned Bowery Burt.

"I'm not a buyer!" said the detective quickly, and then he took a hasty step toward the schemer. "You miserable wretch, do you still want to fatten on crime?" he went on. "You're steeped in it now; the last one at Mrs. Hoyle's is in keeping with your whole life. The murder at Papa Pangborn's does not disgrace you, for you can't be disgraced. I'm not here to give you a dollar for the story of how you first found Floss. I'll work it out myself if you persist in keeping your mouth shut. I can see that you are playing a game against your own kind, that you wear a mask of hypocrisy before Elegant Ahab and his Cleopatra. You're a pretty gang, ain't you?"

All this while Bowery Burt was leaning back on the chair with a malicious smile at the corners of his mouth, and a gleam of brutish defiance in his eyes.

"Go on," he said mentally, as he gave the Gotham Vidocq look for look. "I guess there's a second part to this game. The contents of Ferg Fowler's coffers ain't out of my reach if they do look distant at this moment. I've been in a pickle before and I've always come out preserved. Proceed, Captain Claude. The third trap will hold you forever! You can bet your bottom dollar on this!"

The cool impudence of the Bowery villain irritated the detective, but he did not show it by any looks.

"If you don't like to talk here we'll go," he said calmly. "I will only say again, Bowery Burt, that a still tongue won't keep the result long away. Come!"

"Which way?" asked the kidded sport's right bower as he got up.

"Time will show," and then the detective added with a smile. "You haven't forgotten that the police want to pick you up, eh?"

Bowery Burt changed color.

Just now, of all things, he did not want to drop into the power of the police.

"You are the most wanted man in New York just now," continued Captain Claude. "Your arrest would create a genuine sensation, seeing how you threw Lieutenant Martin against the wall of your room when he came to arrest you. That was a bold break, Bowery Burt."

"And it won, too," said the sport showing his teeth.

Five minutes later Captain Coldgrip had the Dragon League's "best man" under surveillance on the street.

At the first opportunity he hailed a cab, and saw Bowery Burt's countenance change as it approached them.

"Are we going to the station?" asked Elegant Ahab's man between his teeth.

"To the station!" was the ferret's reply.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### A LITTLE MAN AND A BIG PLAY.

If there was a superlatively delighted man in New York at high noon on the day that witnessed Captain Coldgrip's last play, it was the man who occupied a private stall in one of the popular *cafe's* on Broadway with oysters and a bottle of wine before him.

"I'm no chump. I'm a dandy in a gold game, and just now I'm the king-pin of this particular one," he said to himself. "Wasn't it easily made? Jewhiz! he didn't like to take the medicine, but he saw I knew too much for safety and so he came down. Wish I had set the figures a little higher, but I'll give the screws another twist before long. When he gets stubborn, I'll use the last resort—the trump of the deck!"

This man wore a new suit of clothes, the overcoat of which was trimmed with fur. He was good-looking, with a full beard which had just the slightest appearance of being artificial, and his eyes were black and twinkling.

To be correct, he had cause for self-congratulations for he had lately walked out of a certain mansion in the city with twenty thousand dollars in cool crisp notes in his hands.

The reader can guess his identity now, and we hardly need name the solitary feaster by calling him the Raven.

Raven Rob had been liberal with his money since quitting Ferg Fowler's house.

He was a man of few acquaintances, and the amount he had spent had been on himself.

It would have taken the keenest eyed police to have recognized in the daintily clad Raven the man who had invaded the millionaire's library and carried off twenty thousand dollars.

The new outfit had completely transformed him.

"I made a center shot, by Jove!" he went on. "I drove him white when I told him that I met him on a certain night between London and Oak meadows. I hope I'll never have to swear to that in the courts. They curtail a fellow's liberty for perjury in this country. But I hit him hard, all the same!" And he laughed loud enough over his lunch to be heard in the next stall if it had a tenant.

And it had one!

This second person was likewise discussing a plate of "Saddle Rocks," but he had not indulged in the addition of wine.

He seemed to know that the Raven's liberal expenditure on himself had loosened his tongue to a hilarious degree, and whenever he heard sounds in the stall at his back he would listen with a twinkle in his eye.

"Jupiter! it's lucky I found that fellow on the street!" mentally exclaimed the little person, for little he was—indeed, a dwarf. "I can afford to lose Captain Claude for a spell, to keep after my friend the Raven, I may get onto a new trail; who knows? Ah! there! The wine is playing fool again!"

Raven Rob had called a waiter and was ordering another bottle of high priced wine, and had even asked the man if he couldn't find somebody to share his hospitality.

"Fetch in anybody if he's a gentleman and a jolly good fellow!" exclaimed the Raven. "Who cares for expenses when he carries a bank in his clothes? Who's in the next stall, there? I heard some one there awhile ago."

Duke Dado the dwarf started.

"I don't want him to see me here," he cried. "Not at this stage of the play do I want to encounter the Raven face to face."

"The man there is a gentleman who wishes to be alone," said the waiter in reply to the Raven's inquiry.

"Alone, eh? What if I coerce him into the scheme of a dinner fit for a king?" was the boisterous rejoinder.

"Don't, sir."

"I'll manage the treaty! By Jupiter! I want company. I'm dying for it. Bring on the wine as I've ordered."

The waiter started off and the Raven a little the worse for his self-indulgence got up and came to the curtained arch of Duke Dado's stall.

"Hello! beg pardon, my friend," he said parting the curtains and peering into the little place. "Don'tcher want to help a gentleman get away with a feast? I'm Robert Randolph, bet your life, sometimes called—"

Duke Dado saw the man stop as if he had

caught himself at the threshold of a dangerous secret.

The next moment the half-drunken sport was leaning forward with stareful eyes, and Dado was looking into his face.

"Well, by Jove! is it you?" exclaimed the Raven, dropping into the chair opposite the dwarf's place at the table. "You're the last man I expected to see here."

"Aha! you know me then?" said Dado with a smile.

"I'm a cardinal, if I don't! You're Ferg Fowler's—" He was was going to say "dwarf," but he ended by saying "companion."

Dado bowed as if he appreciated the substitution, but his eyes appeared to get a new glitter.

"Well, I don't care," the Raven went on. "You've no objection to breaking a seal with me, eh?"

"No!" said Duke Dado, and at that moment the waiter came back with the Raven's order filled.

"This is more luck!" chuckled the dwarf. "I've had a run of it nearly all day, but maybe it'll change before night."

All at once, the Raven, who was filling the dwarf's glass, paused and looked into his face.

"Why don't you go back?" he asked.

"Back where?"

"To Ferg Fowler, don'cher know!"

The little man smiled.

"You haven't been back since the old Croesus got his mind again, have you?"

"No."

"But you hear from him, eh?"

"Occasionally."

"Don't he want you?"

"I've never inquired," said Dado, and then he added with a smile, "I may be one of the men Ferguson Fowler doesn't want about him all the time."

"A reminder of something, hey?" exclaimed the Raven.

The dwarf started slightly and seemed to wonder what the man meant.

"Well, he's a queer one, Ferg Fowler is!" the sport went on.

"You know him, then?"

"Not very well, but I don't have to know a man for years to read him. Here we go, Duke Dado. I propose the health of Ferg Fowler, your old master—tight as a drum, but easily opened when one knows how. Ha, ha!"

The dwarf seemed to catch the hidden significance of the last words.

"When did you see the old fellow last?" he asked, leaning across the table.

"Maybe since sun-up, and maybe not for a month," was the answer.

"Ha! that's owing to when I wanted you to see him."

"If you say so, yes!" laughed the Raven.

"When did you interview Old Bullion last?"

"A night or so after he lost his mind."

"Not since?"

"No."

"Well, you'd hardly know him," said the Raven, growing serious and confidential. "His eyes are sunk and he's got no color—at least he hadn't any when I left him!"

"Nydia is there yet?"

"Yes."

"Did you see her?"

"I did not."

"Oho! you went to see the banker himself?"

"Yes, Ferg Fowler himself," said the Raven, and the next second he looked like he would have taken the sentence back.

"I'm rather anxious to get direct news from him," the dwarf went on. "When did you see him last?"

Raven Rob had discernment enough left to see that the cunning dwarf was talking for a purpose, and instead of replying, he caught up the bottle and proposed another drink.

"Certainly," said Dado to himself. "I'll drain the wine closets of this *cafe* but what I catch you, Raven Rob."

"By Jove! I must be going," exclaimed the Raven over the empty bottle, but Duke Dado laughed and rung for the waiter.

"You will let me return the compliment," he said to the Raven, who was adjusting the fur collar of his overcoat. "I allow nobody to outdo me in politeness. A bottle of claret, the oldest in the house."

"I protest!" said the Raven, but the sable waiter was off like a shot.

"I'll hold you here if I have to resort to forcible means!" muttered the dwarf. "I want your tongue loosened a little more, Raven Rob, and I think claret will do the business."

Despite the Raven's protests he did not get up and Duke Dado filled his glass with a eulogy on the rare quality of the wine—a eulogy, which almost made the sport's mouth water.

"I guess that hit the spot," chuckled the dwarf, seeing the Raven's eyes snap after the glasses were emptied. "To be sure of it, we'll try another in a moment."

The claret seemed to have a charm for the man who had played his huge game successfully on Ferg Fowler. He wondered why he had not ordered claret before.

"We were speaking about Nydia awhile ago," said the dwarf at length.

"Beautiful creature they say," was the response.

"Yes, and what is more, she's got a firm grip on Fowler's millions."

A light but maudlin laugh came over the Raven's lips.

"Who says so?" he asked.

"I do. Nydia will be worth a mint of money when Ferg Fowler passes in his chips."

"That is"—and Raven Rob leaned suddenly across the table with his eyes glittering—"that is, Duke Dado, if some of us let it be so."

"Who can prevent?" asked the dwarf, professing astonishment.

"I can; so can you!" cried the Raven.

"You don't know what I can do, who I can produce if I want to."

"Oh, I think I understand you," said Dado. "There used to be a belief that a certain person—a young girl—stood in Nydia's way."

"She does! by heaven, she does!" ejaculated the Raven.

"Then I'm glad of it. I once told Ferg Fowler that I would see his air-castles tumble."

"What! don'cher like him?" exclaimed the Raven.

"Not quite well enough to keep his air-castles in good repair," was the adroit response. "But I never took much stock in this story about a better heir than Nydia."

"What if you could see her?"

"I don't know," said the dwarf, shaking his head.

"See here! I've got a notion to make you open your eyes," the Raven went on. "I'm no fool, if I don't hit a big lead very often. I found one within the last twenty-four hours. Why, bless your life, Duke Dado, I can knock Ferg Fowler's air palaces into smithereens."

"I'd like to get in a lick myself," said Dado. "But honestly, Mr. Randolph, I would like to be convinced about this heir business. Is it anything about a girl said to have a tattooed dragon on her arm?"

"By glory! that's just what's she's got!" cried the Raven.

The dwarf beat down his eagerness, but it almost betrayed him in his eyes.

"Look here," he said, grasping the Raven's arm, "if you will show me this girl I'll show you a gate to millions. I know a thing or two, and we can divide a fortune big enough to paralyze Wall street."

Raven Rob pushed his chair back and jumped up with an oath.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed. "I've been thinking that this game is too big for me to play successfully. Come with me, Dado."

The glittering-eyed dwarf was only too eager to follow the man who rushed from the *cafe* stall.

It happened that as they reached the sidewalk a cab came up. The Raven hailed it.

"Number—Hudson street!" said the Raven to the driver, and the next moment he plunged headlong into the cab, where he fell a heap in one corner.

"I didn't claret Raven Rob for nothing," laughed Duke Dado, watching the man already apparently asleep. "Fortune has put me on the track of Floss. I'd bet a thousand on it!"

Meanwhile the cab had turned west and was rattling over the stones.

All at once a voice within shouted to the man on the box:

"My friend in here says it isn't necessary to go to Hudson street," said Duke Dado, opening the door. "He is going to Boston. Drive him to the Grand Central Depot. I'll alight here."

The dwarf stepped out, and the cab turned and rattled north.

"A sadder and a wiser man, Raven Rob!" laughed Dado, watching it.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### OLD BULLION GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

CAPTAIN COLDGRIP walked from the police station where he had left Bowery Burt with a satisfactory smile at his lips.

He had left orders that the kidded sport's right bower should not be allowed to communicate with any one on the outside.

A messenger was dispatched to Papa Pangborn's, for the purpose of bringing the old Jew himself to the station to identify the Bowery sport, and to fasten upon him the charge of murder.

All this was accomplished with secrecy, for the Gotham detective feared that Elegant Ahab and Queen Helen would take flight if they should hear of Bowery Burt's arrest.

The police messenger found a surprise in store for him when he reached Papa Pangborn's.

After effecting an entrance into the house, he found it entirely deserted, but before him was abundant evidence of the old fellow's flight.

The man-trap for once in a long while had no tenant, and Papa Pangborn had left behind no clew to his present whereabouts.

Without his testimony it would be impossible to convict Bowery Burt of murder, but Captain Coldgrip could swear that he had attempted to take human life.

Papa Pangborn had played a shrewd game and then deserted the field.

He feared that, if arrested, Bowery Burt would

throw the blame of Foxy's murder on him, and so he had exposed the real criminal and then disappeared to keep from facing him in court.

"With Bowery Burt behind the bars I can now turn my attention to Elegant Ahab and his Cleopatra!" said Captain Coldgrip as he left the police station. "Floss is gone, but she is not lost. I am certain that Bowery Burt took her from my rooms and that somebody afterward robbed him. Now who takes interest enough in the girl to rob the Bowery spider of her? There is one man who does not want Floss to appear in the game, but does he know that she actually exists? I doubt it. There is another who more than suspitions the girl's identity, and he is the person to whom I must turn, when I look for her. I took her from his clutches once and the Raven is not the man to give up the fight without a second tussle for the stakes."

Captain Coldgrip went back to his rooms on the Bowery.

At the door he found a District Telegraph boy waiting for him with a message.

The city ferret tore it open, and read three words and a name:

"Come to me."

FERGUSON FOWLER."

"Something has happened in gold-dom," said the detective, when the boy went off. "The brevity of this message indicates that all is not serene behind the millionaire's door. I'll go up and see what has happened."

Not long afterward the detective was ushered into a house he had visited before.

Nydia, beautiful but pale and excited, encountered him in the hallway.

"He sent for you some time ago," she said. "You will find him in the library. Merciful Heavens! I fear that the spell of the poisoned pastille is coming back."

"Not that, I hope," replied the detective, hastening forward; and a moment later, he walked into the library.

"Ah! you, at last!" exclaimed a voice, and then a command rang out:

"Shut the door!"

Captain Coldgrip saw Ferg Fowler standing in the middle of the room.

He did not look like himself, and if he had not been found in the heart of his own house, Captain Claude would not have recognized him at first glance.

The city ferret shut the door firmly and came toward the millionaire.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" asked Fowler. "I've turned New York upside down looking for you. You are in my employ, I want you to understand."

"Yes, I am in your service for the present, but I am liable to quit it soon," said the detective, with a smile.

"How? what's that?" cried Fowler, almost starting from the chair into which he had dropped. "You don't leave it till you've run down the Dragon League!"

"That is the agreement, and I will keep to it!" was the answer. "What has happened? I've been sent for, I see."

"I've been robbed—robbed by a cool devil of whose existence I knew nothing till he came here! Do you know anything about a man called the Raven?"

Captain Coldgrip's start was very slight.

"This man is a blackmailer of the deepest dye," continued the millionaire.

"Did he bleed you?"

Ferg Fowler set his teeth hard.

"He did, and to the extent of twenty thousand dollars. He got into the house on a plea of important business, and then he played the infamous cards he held."

"Why didn't you summon Jason and have him put out?"

"I was in his power almost from the moment he entered the room. I want you to find this man—to find him before night! He blackmailed me with a lie and a threat. Great God! I was nervous and not myself. I did not come to until he had departed."

Captain Coldgrip waited patiently for Ferg Fowler to get through.

He saw that the man was terribly excited and the words of Nydia spoken in the hall came to his mind. He more than half believed that the spell of the poisoned pastille had come back.

"Can't you steady your nerves with something, Mr. Fowler?" asked Captain Claude.

"I can try," said the man, opening a drawer in his mahogany writing-desk, and taking out a vial of almost colorless drops. "This sedative holds sway for a while. It seems to be losing its power. Time was when it could rest me for a day, but now not for so long."

Neither of the men spoke again until Fowler had administered some of the medicine to himself.

"Now we will go on," the banker said, in a quieter tone. "This man I want caged. He carried off twenty thousand dollars of my money. He has no connection with the Dragon League that plots against me. He is playing a deep and desperate game of his own."

"What does he claim to know?" asked Captain Claude.

"More than he does know, of course, the villain!" exclaimed Fowler. "He professes to have

in his keeping the Percy child who died in the arms of her nurse years ago in Manchester. That we know isn't true. He also said, the blackmailing fraud, that—"

Fowler suddenly checked himself.

"It is unnecessary to tell what he said," he suddenly resumed. "He gave me to understand that, unless I gave him the money, I might be subjected to personal violence. I didn't care so much for his other threats, for the Raven is an impostor, but I can't afford to be murdered in my own house with the League plotting to make Nydia a beggar. This is why I gave up the sum he demanded. As soon as I recovered, I sent for you. What progress have you made against the League?"

"One of its members is behind the bars."

The millionaire uttered an exclamation of joy.

"The arch Satan who came here—Mortimer Nogg?"

"No, but a man equally as dangerous."

"This is excellent! We will have the whole gang in a little while, eh, captain?"

"I hope so."

"It must be so! there must be no failure. I think, with this League out of the way, I will go on the street again and make up what I've lost. I'm going to fix Nydia for life. By the eternal heavens! a lie, however well played, shall not strip me of my wealth. The captain of the Dragon League threatened to produce a Frances Percy, and so did this Raven who robbed me. Don't you see the falsity of the threats, captain? There can't be two Frances Percys, even if the girl were not dead! Both schemes are villainous in the extreme, and blacker than Tartarus! They have stolen some papers from me, and an object called the diamond dragon; they have robbed me in broad daylight of twenty thousand dollars, but it will amount to nothing in the end. I will come out on top. I don't care who they produce; I will win the game in the end!"

The keen eyes of the detective suddenly became fastened on the millionaire.

"Do you mean to say that you will resist if the real Frances Percy is produced?" he asked.

"Yes!" cried Fowler. "I am going to be master of the situation! Hunt the League down, run the Raven to earth, and then maybe I'll give you another job."

Ferg Fowler's eyes had a new glitter now, as if the effect of the liquid were wearing off.

"What about your missing man, Duke Dado?" asked Coldgrip quickly.

"My French dwarf? Ah! I had dismissed him from my mind since I was convinced that he is dead."

"Dead?" echoed the detective.

"Didn't you see the item?" exclaimed Fowler, and the next moment he took from the desk a newspaper clipping which he handed the man-hunter.

Captain Coldgrip read:

##### "FLOATER FOUND."

"At one o'clock this morning patrol boat number 10 found a floater at the foot of Broad street. The body was that of a small person, evidently a dwarf, and had been in the water some days. There was a tattoo of some kind on the left arm, but the condition of the corpse prevented the patrol from making it out. The floater was not taken to the morgue but was buried at once."

"That, sir, is the last of Duke Dado!" said Fowler, when the detective had finished the item, and there was a latent gleam of satisfaction in the speaker's eye. "Somebody who knew the dwarf sent a marked copy of the paper to the house. He had a tattooed cross and three stars on his left arm. I've seen them often."

"If you think Duke Dado dead, all right," thought Captain Coldgrip. "The atom is too shrewd to let himself be picked up by the river-patrol in a state of decomposition. There is a surprise in store for you, Ferg Fowler. I won't disturb your thoughts about the dwarf's death." And then he said aloud:

"That would seem to settle it."

"It does! it does!" exclaimed Fowler. "You see, Duke Dado didn't have to run away. He had a home here, but he took it into his head to go, and in the end the river police found him. Duke Dado had a checkered history."

"So I suspect," said the detective. "He was with you in England?"

"No, sir!—France is where I picked him up," said the millionaire quickly, and with a flush.

"Was he never in England?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Ferguson Fowler said this with his eyes fixed on the New York sleuth.

"Why do you ask if Duke Dado was ever in England?" he went on.

"You said he had a checkered history."

"So he had, but it was in France."

"In Paris?"

"Mainly there."

"It is singular that he never crossed the channel."

"I believe he had an aversion to English soil."

"Was it because the Scotland Yard detectives wanted him?"

Ferg Fowler started visibly, and then he put on a look of indignation.

"Do you think I would harbor a suspicious person?" he cried. "I don't make my house the abode of criminals! If I had known that Duke Dado was wanted for any crime, I would have handed him over to the authorities."

"There, sir! I see that the effect of your medicine is wearing off," said Captain Coldgrip with a smile. "I won't detain you another moment. I will go back to the trail."

The front door of the mansion had hardly closed on the detective ere the millionaire began to write the following letter:

"THOMAS KEENEAR, *Pirate Detective*:-

"MY DEAR SIR:-You are wanted at my house immediately. Come with the utmost secrecy attainable, and do not delay a moment. Business of the utmost importance. FERGUSON FOWLER."

"I have to set a ferret to watch a ferret," said Fowler excitedly as he sealed the letter. "I'm afraid this Captain Coldgrip knows to much!"

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### STRUCK FOR TEN MILLIONS.

THE message written by Ferg Fowler was delivered to the person for whom it was intended.

Thomas Keenear, or Tom Keen, as he was nicknamed, boasted of being the shrewdest "private detective" in New York.

He was a stout, good-looking but not over-scrupulous fellow, and, whether the millionaire banker knew it or not, he was jealous of Captain Coldgrip.

When Mr. Tom Keen presented himself in Fowler's library, the banker thought he had found a man who would do exactly what he wanted done.

"Of course you know a certain detective named Captain Coldgrip?" began Fowler.

"I know him."

The private detective spoke in a manner which set Fowler know that, as far as Thomas Keenear was concerned, there was no love between the two ferrets.

"I suspect," resumed Fowler, "I suspect, and from good reasons, too, that this man Coldgrip is playing a game I don't like."

"Quite likely; these fellows do that sometimes."

"I have sent for you to get at the truth of my belief. I will tell you: I have been harassed by a certain pack who want to bleed me. They may attempt to foist upon me a certain young woman for whom they will claim a good deal of my wealth."

"Blackmail, eh?" ejaculated Mr. Keenear.

"Blackmail of the meanest nature!" was the response. "I want to know whether Captain Coldgrip, who has been in my employ, as I will frankly confess to you, knows where this girl is, or has anything to do with her."

The private detective opened his eyes.

"I want you to shadow him. It will be diamond cut diamond, I presume, but your reputation as a private detective makes me think that I have not put this case into wrong hands."

"I hope not, sir," said Keenear. "Captain Coldgrip will be shadowed from the moment I catch sight of him. Want to know about the girl, eh?"

"Yes. If he is protecting any one, you are to find out all you can about her, and I am to have the information immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"That looks like business," said Ferg Fowler to himself when he had dismissed the man he had pitted against the best detective in Gotham. "I think I've made no mistake in getting Thomas Keenear into my employ. We will have some news from him in a short time."

Slowly the day went by, and the shadows of night gathering about the great city found Ferg Fowler seated anxiously in his accustomed place.

On the desk before him were a number of papers which he had assorted into two piles.

The door of the library was locked, and he was its only occupant.

At last he began to burn some of the papers in the gas-jet before him.

"I'll get ready for the worst, anyhow," he said. "Great heavens! I never expected an outcome of this kind. It is a good thing that I persuaded Nydia to take in the opera. She would wonder why I am burning so many papers, and I would not like to tell her that the Dragon League is liable to make a dangerous play if Captain Coldgrip has become suspicious of me."

He was in the act of burning a legal-looking document when he heard a soft rap on the door.

"I told Jason plainly that I was not to be disturbed," said Ferg Fowler, glancing madly toward the door.

The knocking was repeated.

Suppressing an oath, the man got up and crossed the room.

"Jason?" he said—"is that you, Jason?"

"No, sir," said a voice, undoubtedly a woman's.

"By Jove! it can't be Nydia," exclaimed Fowler, and then, full of curiosity, he unlocked the door and opened it.

A most beautiful young woman stood before him—tall, exquisitely molded, and with radiant black eyes—in short, a perfect beauty.

The millionaire's look in an instant became a stare.

"You will pardon me, but I could not keep away any longer," the woman said. "I am here on business of the utmost importance," and as Fowler held the door open she crossed the threshold and swept into the library.

An indescribable thrill passed over Fowler's frame. He turned and looked strangely at the woman.

"May I ask you to be seated, Mr. Fowler?" she said turning the witchery of her eyes upon him. "You shall know in a minute that I have a right to be heard."

Ferguson Fowler shut the door and went back to the chair at his desk.

He tried to appear like his old self, but it was impossible. There was a spell about him that kept all color from his face, and made his heart beat fiercely.

"In God's name," he thought, "who is this woman?"

For a moment his visitor seemed to notice the ashes of the papers he had lately burned, and there appeared the semblance of a smile at the corners of her finely chiseled mouth.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the millionaire.

"A good deal perhaps," was the answer. "Ferguson Fowler, I am under the painful necessity of announcing that I am Frances Percy!"

The studied coolness of this startling statement almost drove the banker from his chair.

What! this woman the person held over his head by the Dragon League? or, was she the one known to the Raven?

Ferg Fowler tried to calm himself in a little time.

"Frances Percy, eh?" he said. "I don't believe I fully understand you."

"I am Frances Percy, the only child of Major Percy of Oak Meadows, England. You knew my father; you were appointed my guardian by the will he left behind. I know that it is the popular belief that I died in Manchester whither I was conveyed by my nurse, Mary May Cable, but I am alive and before you with incontestable proofs of my identity. I am here for the property left me by my father."

"Ho! I see!" exclaimed Ferg Fowler with a sneer that made the woman's eyes brighten. "Your coming here is a part of the game against me. It is a good play—bold and rather brilliant, but it won't succeed. Proofs, eh? I'd like to see proofs that you are the child who died in Manchester some years ago."

"The child did not die. The nurse, plunging into dissipation, deserted it, and left it to its fate. In the first place, I have the ring that encircled my finger when I disappeared from Oak Meadows a short time after my father's death. I have it with me now—a little gold ring with a miniature dragon's head on it. In the next place, the strange crest of my house is tattooed on my left arm as you shall see."

As she finished the banker's visitor threw back the rich cloak she wore and showed a cut in her sleeve.

"Look for yourself," she went on opening the dress as she leaned forward. "Behold the tattoo that establishes my identity beyond question."

Ferg Fowler could not have kept back if death had been the penalty for leaning forward.

He saw in the soft gaslight the roseate flesh of the woman's arm, and upon it a tattooed dragon very well done!

The millionaire's eyes seemed to dilate while he gazed; they became riveted upon the work before him.

If he had looked up he would have seen two brilliant eyes fixed upon him—eyes that burned with triumph deep and long played for.

"That will do," he said, leaning back in his chair. "I am to believe that you are Frances Percy because you have a certain ring and a tattoo on your arm?"

"What further proof do you want?"

"It isn't enough. I have proof that the child did die in Manchester. I have nothing to do with the dissipation of the nurse. I don't call you Frances Percy. I never can."

"Then who am I?" asked the woman.

The question seemed to come through clinched teeth.

Ferg Fowler had thought rapidly.

A woman of her beauty and shrewdness could not have been educated to a game of this kind by the Raven. No, she must be the one held over him by Mortimer Nogg, or, as he had recently learned, Elegant Ahab.

"Who are you?" he said in a moment. "Why, you are the Queen of the Dragon League—the woman mentioned by the devil who came here with the deadly pastilles."

"Oh, that is a counter charge!" laughed the visitor, showing two rows of pearly teeth. "I am Frances Percy! If you want me to play my game out, Ferguson Fowler, I will do it to your cost. If you want the past raked up it shall be done. I have not been an unknown heir all this time for nothing. If I am an impostor, as you boldly assert, the contest to come will show it. If you are ready for it, I am."

"I am ready!" said Fowler, with spirit, and he went on under his breath:

"By Jove! I'm going to take the bull by the

horns. The Dragon League shall not down me with a hand of this kind. This woman hasn't a drop of Percy blood in her veins. She hasn't a single line of the major's physiognomy. But, by Jove! she is a beauty! Just the woman to ally herself with the pastille demon."

"I want you to think of the fight before you," the self-styled Frances Percy said.

"I have thought," was the quick response.

"I will spend my millions—"

"Your millions? When did they become yours?" interrupted the banker's visitor.

"When I made them!" he cried.

"Ah! when was that? Was it the night Major Percy died in his private apartment at Oak Meadows? Was it when you rode from the mansion to London and crept into bed at the Albemarle on the fringe of daylight? Let me ask you if those millions were made at either of these periods of your life history. Do you want me to go further?"

"Oh, I expect you to show a well-woven web of deception," ejaculated Fowler. "It's a deep game, you know; it emanated from the brilliant brain of Elegant Ahab, whose apt pupil I see you are. Why, I'll set the police on you!"

This was what Ferg Fowler called "taking the bull by the horns, and he thought it a crushing play.

"That is right! Set the police at the heels of the child of the man who would be alive to-day, perhaps, but for your infamous greed for gold. Call me impostor—deceiver—fraud—what you please, Ferg Fowler, but I am ready to prove that my hands are not stained with the blood of a noble Englishman!"

The millionaire banker recoiled; the woman was on her feet, and with flashing eyes and outstretched hand she boldly confronted him.

"Fraud, am I? the ally of some person called Elegant Ahab, eh?" she went on. "Who and what are you? Do you want your crime paraded before New York? Do you force me to prove that Major Percy did not commit suicide? In God's name, Ferguson Fowler, must I stand up in the courts and fight my father's murderer for my own?"

The millionaire grew livid and then white.

He saw the woman step toward the door transformed into a real fury.

Her last words rung through the house like a trump of doom to the white-faced man.

"Very well! let it come!" she said. "If you want to lose all I shall go ahead. If you want to go back to Oak Meadows, back you shall go!"

Fowler made an effort to leave the chair but failed.

"What do you want?" he gasped. "You want money, but how much? Name your price."

A smile appeared on the woman's face. She took a step forward.

"I want ten millions!" she said in a whisper.

Ferg Fowler seemed to gasp for breath.

"Ten millions? You'd better take my blood!" he cried, and fell in a swoon at the woman's feet!

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### CORNERED IN A CAB.

ONE of the most surprised denizens of New York was our friend Robert Randolph, alias the Raven, when he awakened from the drunken stupor and found himself being carried rapidly down a broad street.

He was the only occupant of the cab, and this discovery tended to recall his experience at the *cafe* with Duke Dado.

"Jehosaphat! this isn't Hudson street!" exclaimed the Raven. "What kind of a game has the dwarf played against me? Let me see where I am. Hello, there, you son of Jehu!"

He had opened the door of the vehicle, and was shouting at the driver.

"Where are you taking me to?" he demanded.

"Grand Central Depot, sir—almost there now."

"Grand Central thunder!" grated the sport. "Who ordered you to take me thither?"

"You, sir."

"I? The devil, no!"

"Your friend said the orders came from you, anyhow."

"Just as I thought! I am the victim of some deep game. Drive me as fast as you can to Number—Hudson. Where did the little imp get out?"

"At West and Varick."

"Great Caesar! Only a square from Hudson! I wish your horses had wings. Take me back in the shortest time possible," and then he closed the door and sunk back among the cushions with a volley of oaths and clinched hands.

Minutes seemed hours to the Raven as the jaded horses responded as well as they could to the Jehu's whip.

"Why didn't I see through it all? It's a wonder I wasn't robbed, but I find all my valuables still in my possession. I'll be surprised if I find the city diamond where I left her. I made a fool of myself at the *cafe*, that's what I did. If I had the throat of the dwarfed imp in my fingers, by Jupiter! I'd choke him to death!"

At last the cab rolled into Hudson street, and

the horses were pulled up in front of a rather large and dingy-looking frame house of old style.

The man on the box did not have to announce his arrival at the certain number to his passenger, for the door of the cab was jerked open almost before the horses had stopped.

"You'll find your pay on the seat," said the Raven with a look at the driver, and then he sprung across the sidewalk and threw himself into the house.

If he was the worse for wine a short time before, he was sober now.

The trick which had been played on him had brought him back to his senses.

He entered a hall and bounded up a stair two steps at a time.

To the right of the landing above, a door stood slightly ajar; the sight of it parted the Raven's lips.

"Gone! I'll bet a horse she's gone!" he exclaimed, and the next moment he stood in a small room well furnished and of neat appearance, but he was its only occupant.

"I took her from Bowery Burt, and he robbed Captain Coldgrip. Now, by heavens! Duke Dado, Ferg Fowler's dwarf and accomplice, despoils me! It is turn about, but I don't like it. There's too much at stake in this game to be euchiored in this manner!"

Raven Rob gave utterance to these sentences while he stood half-bewildered and mad in the middle of the room.

"The claret did it!" he went on. "If I ever drink another drop of it, may I never see paradise! Where is the imp and his prize? By George! I'm not going to let him get off with Floss. I can't afford it if I have got twenty thousand of Ferg Fowler's money!"

After awhile he locked the room and went down-stairs.

"Maybe I can strike the trail somewhere in the vicinity," he said to himself. "It would be worth a Wall street fortune to do it. If Duke Dado took Floss away, it was in broad daylight and somebody must have seen him."

Just opposite the house which had been despoiled of its beautiful and mysterious prisoner, was a saloon, and the Raven made a bee-line for it from the frame.

The young man behind the bar recognized him as he entered.

"Did you see anybody go in and out o' my house over the way to-day?" he asked.

"I did, captain," exclaimed a sharp-featured boy of ten who sat on a beer-keg in one corner of the saloon. "Don't I know Jimmy Dunn when I see him, hey?"

"Jimmy Dunn?" echoed the Raven.

"Jimmy's the whip what drives number 615. He drives up, over thar, awhile ago, and lets a little man out. The little fellow goes into the house, and pretty soon out he comes with a young girl, and Jimmy drives 'em away."

Raven Rob listened to this brief narration with his heart in his throat.

"A clew already and a good one, too!" he said. "Jimmy Dunn drove for 'em, eh? Where will I be apt to find Jimmy?"

"Number 615 is ginerally about Washington Square when not on the jog," was the reply.

"A thousand thanks, boy," said Raven Rob, tossing the urchin a silver dollar and gulping down the drink he had poured out. "The imp thinks he has covered his tracks, but I'll show him a hand he doesn't look for!" and out he went.

Not very long afterward he turned into Washington Square, and began to inspect the hacks waiting for custom in the shade of the trees.

If he had looked behind him he would have seen a pair of eyes watching his movements with a great deal of interest; but just then the Raven thought of one thing only, and that was the discovery of hack 615.

Wherever he went he was followed by the person who had spotted him the moment he struck the Square.

"Hello! I've found it at last!" suddenly ejaculated the Raven, and the next moment he confronted a young hackman, who stepped nimbly toward him as he came up.

"Jimmy Dunn, eh?" asked the sport.

"Jimmy Dunn, at your service, sir."

"You're the man I want."

"All right!" and the hackman opened the door of his vehicle. "Where is it, sir?"

Raven Rob moved forward, but all at once he stopped and looked into the young Celt's face.

"I'm a friend of the parties you took from Hudson street awhile ago," he said. "It is very important that I should see the young lady at once. I want you to take me direct to the house where you left her."

Jimmy Dunn threw a quick look over his right shoulder, and seemed to catch sight of the person who had dogged the Raven's footsteps.

"Get right in, sir," he said to Raven Rob.

"By Jove! this is Satan's own luck!" mentally ejaculated the happy sport. "There will be an eclipse before night; if I don't make Duke Dado wish he had never seen America, I'll go bald! All right, Jimmy. Snug I am! Now, start your horses."

At that moment a man stepped up to the hack.

"I want to go to Broadway," he said in a loud tone.

"I'm going that way. Get right in," said the Jehu from his box.

The Raven started.

"By Jove! I don't want company!" he growled. "There's no telling what kind of a passenger the Irish hackman wants to force upon me. I won't—"

This sentence was cut short by the sudden opening of the door, and a second later a man dropped upon the seat in front of the sport.

"Captain Coldgrip!" cried Raven Rob, starting like one shot, and quick as a flash the new passenger darted forward and laid an ice-cold finger on his hand.

"I am Claude Coldgrip," he went on with his piercing eyes fastened on the thunderstruck sport. "You don't want to move a hand, or lift your voice to the driver. I will give all the orders necessary. That was a cool game you played at Ferg Fowler's, Raven, but you spoiled it all by getting drunk at the *cafe*."

Raven Rob could hardly suppress an exclamation of astonishment; his dilated eyes showed his speechless wonder.

"I thought I would run across you looking for Jimmy Dunn," the detective went on. "You fell into the trap I set for you on Hudson street. I told Duke Dado that you would come hustling back from the Grand Central Depot when you came to your senses. I knew you would make an inquiry at the saloon opposite your Hudson street retreat, and so I told the boy on the watch there that you'd find Jimmy Dunn in Washington Square. It worked well, the game did, don't you think so, Raven Rob?"

The entrapped sport bit his lip and gave Captain Coldgrip a look of burning fierceness.

He was silent for a moment.

"This is your play, sure enough, captain," he said. "You want to see mine!"

"If it is no better than your present one, it won't be worth fooling with. You went for the millionaire in good style, Raven Rob."

A twinkle appeared in the depths of the Raven's eyes.

"What do you know about that job?" he said.

"All that Fowler could tell me," was the reply.

"Do you think he told you *all*?"

"Perhaps not," said the city sleuth with a smile. "There may have been threats of which he did not speak. You played the game deep enough to get twenty thousand from him, though. Why didn't you raise the pile?"

"Oho! I thought it quite enough for the first pull," said the Raven. "Now, since you have me, as you think, Captain Coldgrip, may I ask what is to be your next play?"

"With you?"

"With me, of course."

"I am going to take you away from the quarry for the present."

"To a station?"

"Why not?"

Raven Rob drew back and looked madly at the cool man on the seat before him.

"What is the charge to be?" he asked between his teeth.

"Blackmail and robbery!"

"Not that! you are no fool, captain!" exclaimed the Raven. "You don't want me to expose the infamous past life of the man who has employed you to fight his enemies. No; you can have no desire to have Ferg Fowler's English life thrown open to the world. I went to his house. I told him that if he didn't give me twenty thousand, I would tell some secrets which he would like to buy for millions if he could. You don't want me to beggar your client, Claude Coldgrip!"

"You can tell all you know whenever you please," the detective said. "I wouldn't give you a dollar to keep your lips shut. The truth is, Raven Rob, that you don't know much. You may have got onto an old trail which once puzzled the Scotland Yard detectives, and, then, you have guessed a good deal. You have been playing a game of your own against the Dragon League; you know that Foxy started to decoy me among Papa Pangborn's man-traps. Do you think I'll let you go because of your threats against Ferg Fowler and his millions? I am winding up one of the greatest trails of my life. I have a right to boast at this stage of it, because a crying wrong is to be righted. We are going to the Mulberry Street Station. If you don't like to have the charge of blackmail set against your name, I'll substitute an old one of burglary."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the burglary of the Old Trust Bank, which you and Foxy did so well several years ago. What shall the charge be, Raven Rob, burglary or blackmail?"

"It shall be neither!" hissed the cornered sport, and the next instant he threw himself across the little space between his seat and Captain Coldgrip.

The detective was not wholly unprepared for a sudden *coup*, but the limited interior of the jolting vehicle was soon discovered to be not a very good place to struggle in.

The hand of the Raven darted straight at Captain Claude's throat, but the wrist was speedily encircled by the famous icy fingers, and before the blackmailer could follow up his attack, he was back on his cushions again, and the New York spotter had the upper hand!

"To 205 Mulberry, Jimmy!" exclaimed the detective to the anxious driver who began to ply the whip anew. "It's all right in here! The tiger showed his claws—that is all."

Away went the hack faster than ever, and a few minutes afterward Captain Coldgrip carried the body of an unconscious man into the Fourteenth Precinct police station!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE COBRA IN THE HOUSE.

LET US GO BACK TO FERG FOWLER.

IT WILL BE REMEMBERED THAT WE LEFT HIM IN A swoon at the feet of the woman who had invaded his library and proclaimed herself the lost and supposed Frances Percy.

THE DEMAND FOR TEN MILLIONS ON HIS TREASURY was too much for the millionaire, and the enormity of it had thrown him senseless before the cool woman, who was none other than Helen Hotspur, as the reader has doubtless surmised.

A cynical smile passed over Helen's face when she looked down and saw her work.

"I guess I struck the gold shark a little too hard," she exclaimed, and then with a glance toward the door she leaned over the prostrate body and began to examine the papers on the table. "There's a mine of available weapons here, I see," she went on after a brief inspection. "He hadn't come to some of the best ones when I came upon the scene. I can intrench myself here and he dare not drive me out. I have played too long for these stakes to be ejected now. The Dragon League or its queen, at least, has come to stay until it has won the prize of the game—ten cool millions in solid cash! Drive me out? I'd like to see him!"

SEEING THAT FERG FOWLER EXHIBITED NO SIGNS OF A SPEEDY RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS, HELEN LEFT THE ROOM AND THE HOUSE.

A CLOSED CARRIAGE STOOD IN THE GUTTER BEFORE THE MANSION, AND THE DOOR OPENED AS SHE CAME UP.

"Well, what did the play amount to?" asked the voice of a man on the inside.

"The demand rather unnerved him," said Helen with a quick twinkle in her Cleopatrian eyes. "I am going to remain here till I win."

"What! ain't you going back with me?"

"No. You can go back alone, Ahab. I am here to stay, I tell you. When he comes to himself, he must find Frances Percy an inmate of his house. I won't yield an inch without the ten millions!"

THE HANDSOME MAN IN THE CARRIAGE SHRUGGED HIS SHOULDERS AND SEEMED TO RECOIL.

"By Jove! you're a gamester!" he said admiringly.

"Why enter a game if you don't intend to play it out?" said the woman quickly. "Go home or where you will. I go back to Ferg Fowler's mansion to *pose* as Frances Percy. He was inclined to laugh my pretensions down; he even threatened to call in the police; but don't get frightened, Ahab. He will never do that—never! Good-night! I will win with the hand I've got."

THREE MINUTES LATER HELEN HOTSPUR RECROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF FERG FOWLER'S LIBRARY TO FIND A GHASTLY LOOKING MAN SITTING IN THE ARM-CHAIR FROM WHICH HE HAD FALLEN A FEW MINUTES BEFORE.

THE CARRIAGE OUTSIDE HAD BEEN DRIVEN AWAY AND WAS OUT OF SIGHT.

"Ah! you are yourself again," said Helen advancing toward the millionaire whose eyes became riveted upon her.

"And you are still here?" he replied. "I had hoped that I was shut of you."

A SMILE STARTED ON THE WOMAN'S LIPS, BUT SHE QUICKLY SUPPRESSED IT.

"YOU WILL PARDON ME," SHE SAID, "BUT I CAN NOT LEAVE HERE TILL CERTAIN BUSINESS HAS BEEN TRANSACTED."

"WHAT IS THAT?"

"I WANT MY OWN. I AM FRANCES PERCY. I HAVE SHOWN YOU THE TATTOO ON MY ARM. YOU DO NOT WANT TO CONTRADICT MY CLAIM, OR IT MIGHT MAKE SERIOUS TROUBLE."

HE LOOKED AT HER A LONG TIME BEFORE HE SPOKE.

"WON'T YOU TAKE LESS AND GO AWAY?" HE SAID AT LAST.

"LESS THAN THE SUM I HAVE STATED?"

"YES."

"I CAN'T AFFORD TO."

"YOU WILL ROB NYDIA, THE YOUNG LADY WHO IS MY MARD."

"I CAN'T HELP THAT. TEN MILLIONS DO NOT CONSTITUTE YOUR WEALTH, FERGUSON FOWLER. YOU ARE WORTH—THAT IS, YOU HOLD MORE THAN THAT. DO YOU WANT THIS MATTER TO GET INTO THE COURTS?"

"NO," SAID FOWLER WITH A PERCEPTE SHUDDER. "MY GOD! NO!"

"I THOUGHT NOT," REPLIED HELEN WITH A SMILE. "I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU HAVE EMPLOYED A CERTAIN DETECTIVE OF LATE. WAS IT TO FIND ME?"

THE GOLD KING SHOOK HIS HEAD.

"YOU SAID A WHILE AGO THAT I WAS SOMEBODY'S ACCOMPLICE—THAT MY APPEARANCE HERE WAS A PART OF A GAME AGAINST YOUR MONEY. WHY ARE

you so cruel? Is this the way you treat the child of Major Percy, the man who started you on the road to wealth?"

"Major Percy?" echoed Fowler, looking into her face. "You don't look like him."

"I should suppose not, after the checkered life I have been obliged to lead," was the reply. "But I need not detain you here. If you will have me shown to a chamber, I will leave you to reflect till morning."

Fowler started and uttered a cry of astonishment.

"What! are you going to remain?" he asked.

"Why not?" smiled Helen. "Isn't this house, in part, my home? I install myself here until everything has been adjusted."

The very boldness of the impostor was startling.

He knew that there was no Percy blood in the veins of the woman before him; her mien, her cold words told him that she was playing a deep game for gold.

The thought of having her under his roof was galling. What if she should meet Nydia and proclaim herself Frances Percy, who, as he had told his ward, was surely dead?

"Won't you go away and let us have another meeting?" he said.

"No! I cannot. I stay here till I get what belongs to me," was the retort.

Ferg Fowler seemed set his teeth hard, as if he had taken a desperate resolution.

"Very well. You must wait till I am ready to meet your terms," he said. "If you are to become my guest, you will find a lady's apartment on the right of the hall above."

Triumph flashed up in Helen's eyes as she leaned forward and touched him with one of her tapering fingers.

"Remember!" she said, in low tones. "You are to show no signs of disapproval, Mr. Fowler. If you attempt to eject me without a settlement in full I will strip you of the mask you wear, and hold you up to the derision of New York. I am Frances Percy, and you dare not deny it. I am your guest till justice discharges me. This is indeed a game, but it is Frances Percy against the man who sprinkled her father's gold with blood before he took it. Now, good-night."

The woman drew back with her eyes gleaming over flushed cheeks, and before Ferg Fowler could catch his breath again he heard her on the stair.

"In God's name, what am I to do with that woman in my house?" he exclaimed. "She has the gall of Mephistopheles, and the cold demonism of a thug. I have made provision for startling events, but I never thought of being confronted by a being like this. Must I give up ten millions to be bled again by her? That sum, large as it is, would only whet the appetite of the Dragon League, whose first play was the theft of the papers and the diamond dragon. I could throttle this woman, beautiful as she is! I could throw her into the Hudson and watch the waters wash her out to sea. She knows more than the Raven claimed to know, and he bled me for twenty thousand dollars. I am face to face with the Queen of the Dragon League. I would sooner have faced Elegant Ahab than this admixture of beauty and demonism."

Fowler left his chair, crossed the room and listened at the door.

No sound was heard in the house.

"I wonder how the cobra got inside," he said to himself. "I remember that I haven't heard Jason since sundown. Did he let the plague in? Something must be done! I would give a thousand if Captain Coldgrip or my new man, Thomas Keeneear, would come."

But neither of the detectives obliged the millionaire by coming to his rescue at that particular moment.

He went back to his desk and to the work interrupted by Helen when she called.

He ran swiftly over the papers now and burned them rapidly.

"Burning my ships behind me!" he ejaculated, with a sickly attempt at merriment. "By the dead saints! Ferg Fowler is going to win in the end. And the woman up-stairs will find the tables completely turned on her before morning."

He was still engaged at his task when the bell announced somebody at the door.

Fowler waited awhile for Jason to admit or inspect the visitor, but as he did neither, the millionaire got up with a word of censure and went to the door himself.

"Ah! the man I want!" he exclaimed, seeing Tom Keeneear on the steps. "Come in with as little noise as possible."

And Captain Coldgrip's rival tip-toed it into the library, watched with delight by the banker-millionaire.

Fowler shut the door carefully behind them.

"I have a favorable report," said the private detective before Fowler could speak. "I have discovered that Captain Coldgrip has a certain young girl under his protection."

"The Old Harry!" ejaculated Fowler. "Where is she?"

"Where I can lay my hands on her when you want me to do so."

"I'll want you to do that very soon, I hope," was the response. "But I have work for you right here in my house."

"Here?" echoed the detective, showing considerable surprise. "What has happened?"

"I've got a dangerous guest; a woman who claims to be what she is not. She has installed herself under my roof and declares that she will not leave until she has blackmailed me to an amount that would break the best banks in the city."

The private detective opened his eyes.

"Where is she?" he asked, looking about the room. "By Jupiter, Mr. Fowler, this is a bold piece of business."

"It is galvanized gall," grated Fowler.

"Who does she claim to be?"

"One Frances Percy, who died long ago."

"Percy? Percy—"

"Oh, you didn't know the family, captain," interrupted the millionaire. "This cobra is upstairs in the best boudoir in the house."

"Gone to bed, eh?" grinned the Shadower.

"She retired some time ago."

"Well," said Keeneear, straightening, "what do you want done?"

"I want her silenced! And I don't want her here, either. Nydia will be coming back from the opera by and by, and I wouldn't have those women meet for half I'm worth."

"Will you show me the room?" asked the private sleuth-hound with a coolness that seemed to give Fowler hope.

"I'll take you up, but first tell me that you will silence her."

"How much is it worth?" asked Keeneear with a smile.

"Five thousand?" ventured the banker.

"Yes."

"Then go ahead. Come, I will guide you to the door of her room. Maybe you will know her. You detectives know all the doubtful characters. Remember, I want this one dealt with effectually."

"Show me up," said Keeneear, like a person eager for the fray.

Emboldened by the presence of the man who had thus opportunely come to his rescue, Ferg Fowler was only to eager too obey.

He opened the library door and led the private detective up the stair.

At the door of a room in the corridor above Fowler paused and looked at his hired tool whose eyes were full of expected triumph.

Thomas Keeneear stepped forward and laid his hand on the knob.

"Now for a display of tigress teeth!" he laughed.

The next moment the door was jerked open in his face, and in the full light of a gas-jet stood Helen Hotspur with eyes in a blaze.

"I will not be disturbed!" she said, looking over the barrel of a revolver. "You can take your trail-dog down-stairs, Mr. Fowler, or I will kill him in his tracks!"

"Come!" said Keeneear, wheeling about. "I know that woman, and I don't want to deal with her!"

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### DESPERATE MEASURES.

The millionaire banker looked at the private detective, and could hardly keep back an exclamation of surprise.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said Helen, and then the door was shut.

"Don't you intend to keep your word?" exclaimed Fowler.

"Not if I have to deal with that woman," was the reply.

"I'll call the police in and have her ejected."

"You may, but I wouldn't," said Keeneear. "She's dangerous. I tell you I'd get rid of her as quietly as possible."

"Would you compromise with her?"

"I don't know but that I would."

"I will not! by heavens! never!" grated Fowler. "She is a money leech with no mercy. She sha'n't make me a beggar!"

The two men re-entered the library and Fowler dropped into his favorite chair.

"Now, who is this person up-stairs?" he asked of the detective. "You call her dangerous, and why? You must know something about her. You have met her before?"

The private detective smiled faintly.

"We have met before, but let me stop here," he said.

"Ah! you don't like to unmask her?" said Fowler quickly.

"It is not that, but I don't like to open a certain past."

Fowler was silent for a moment.

"You will tell me one thing, I know. How long have you known her?"

"Ten years."

"Had she a tattooed dragon on her arm then?"

The detective started.

"No, nothing of that kind," he said.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Fowler.

"This proves that she is a base impostor. I don't compromise with such people! Is there any place in the city where tattooing is done?"

"A dozen or more, perhaps. I know an old fellow who is such an expert at the art, that a tattoo finished yesterday will look twenty years old to-day."

"That is the person I want to find!" cried Fowler.

"What! are you going to prove that a certain tattoo on the woman's arm has been put there for the purpose of hoodwinking you?"

"I am! and then, by the furies! I am going to send the beautiful blackmailer to Sing Sing!" and the millionaire brought his hand down upon his desk with emphasis. "Don't you want me to do this, Mr. Keeneear."

"Yes! I wish she was behind the latticed iron of Sing Sing now."

"Help me, then."

Thomas Keeneear seemed to draw back.

"Do all you can and I'll pay you liberally. Go and see this famous tattooer; find when and where he tattooed a dragon on a woman's arm. Get the points for me, and I'll have the rest attended to. This is a deep game sure enough, and I am going to see it played to the bitter end. Now, about the girl I told you to look for—the one Captain Coldgrip is supposed to protect. You told me you have found her?"

"That is true. She is where I can get her at any time with a little strategy."

"Good!" said Fowler brightening up. "You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"Did you get a good look?"

"I studied her face for ten minutes or more."

Ferguson Fowler said nothing, but wheeled his chair toward the little steel safe and opened it.

He next unlocked a drawer on the inside and took from it a pocket which he began to unwrap as he turned back to the private detective.

"Does she look like this picture?" he said placing before Keeneear a daguerreotype.

The detective looked at the face before him a moment and then caught the banker's eye.

"Is this a picture of the girl's mother?" he exclaimed.

Fowler smiled.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"I would say it is," was the reply.

"The girl you have found in Captain Coldgrip's keeping resembles this picture, does she?"

"She is the counterpart of it."

"And the face up-stairs does not resemble this one?"

"Not at all."

"Very well. I am glad you have found the captain and his protegee," said Fowler. "Now, I want you to employ a little strategy. You need not fight the serpent in my house to-night. I will do that. I want this girl taken away from Captain Coldgrip."

"Abducted, eh?"

"Call it what you will," said the banker, with a smile. "He must not have her in his clutches. I guess I'm rich enough to employ you, Mr. Keeneear?"

"It will take work. Claude Coldgrip is no boy."

"We acknowledge that; but I am not afraid to put you against him. When you have removed the girl from his care, report at once."

"Do you want her brought to your house?"

"No!" cried Fowler, starting. "You know where she will be safe till further orders; take her there. Does Captain Coldgrip seem to be her only friend?"

"No. I have already discovered two others."

"Who are they?"

"One is a young man, a little past twenty; the other is a dwarf."

Ferg Fowler gave utterance to an exclamation he could not keep back.

"A dwarf, do you say, Mr. Keeneear?" he cried.

"Are you certain of this?"

"I am; and what is more, sir, he looks like the person you used to have about the house."

"Duke Da o? Impossible! Why, that imp of humanity is dead!—the river police picked him up off the wharves some time ago."

"That may be. I only say he resembles the servant you used to have."

"I have proof in this desk of my dwarf's death," Fowler said; "but I wish you would watch the one who is the girl's friend along with Captain Coldgrip and the young man. I may have been deceived—there is a possibility of this. If I have been—if the dwarf you have seen has a tattooed cross and three stars on his arm—if one of his front teeth is gold-built, I want you to come at once to me for instructions. Not hold on! I'll instruct you now."

Ferg Fowler got up and went to the door that opened into the hall.

He opened it noiselessly and looked up the richly-carpeted stair to the door of Helen Hotspur's room.

It was closed and all was silent there.

"I don't want that dwarf to bother me if he is marked as I have just told you," he said, going back to Tom Keeneear. "If you can net him and bring him here secretly, do it. If he gives you trouble, fix him so he will never get a chance to blackmail me! I've got some desperate enemies to fight. The money leeches are determined to strip me. Do you know Elegant Ahab?"

"Yes; and so does the woman up-stairs!" laughed the private detective.

"I know that. We understand one another now, I think."

Thomas Keene bowed.

"What are you going to do with your guest?" he asked as he rose to depart.

"Leave her to me," was the answer in a tone of confidence. "Do your duty; get the girl away from Captain Coldgrip and fix the dwarf. I'm on top yet in spite of the League and my other enemies! They don't euer Ferguson Fowler in a gold game as big as this. He's got too much at stake!"

A minute afterward the front door of the millionaire's mansion opened and shut, and the private detective passed out into the night.

"Ho! this means something!" ejaculated a person who saw Thomas Keene come down the broad steps, and when the secret sleuth walked away he had a tracker at his heels. "I believe my old master has grown tired or suspicious of Captain Claude. If he has, he finds employment for one of the most disreputable shadowers in New York. What is your mission, Mr. Tom Keene? I'll just give you a little attention and get onto your work, if I can."

The private detective did not walk far before he found a cab which was soon whirling him toward the lower part of the city.

If he had looked behind the vehicle he would have seen a passenger not included in the single fare he was to pay the driver, a passenger who looked like a monkey clinging to the irons, with his body half under the cab.

But with a big fee ahead, the private sleuth did not think of spies, and began to lay his plans as the horses carried him along.

"Ha! ha!" he suddenly laughed. "Who expected to see *that woman* in Ferg Fowler's mansion, and intrenched there, too? She must be playing a gigantic game, sure enough! She threatened to drop me in my tracks if I didn't make speed down-stairs! Well, I guess I went. I don't want to deal with Helen Hotspur, as she calls herself in certain quarters. I've seen her before, and I hope circumstances will speedily remove her from this game if I am to take hand in it. I don't want to play against a fury like that."

The cab did not stop till it rolled up before a certain house in the Bowery, and the private sleuth alighted and paid the driver.

He did not notice the living object between the wheels, and the cab carried it away as Mr. Keene turned to the house, his own private quarters.

"You will probably take a rest before you make a move in Ferg Fowler's favor," said the dead-head passenger dropping to the ground from his uncomfortable perch. "I will see Captain Claude and inform him that it is diamond cut diamond. But first I'll go back to Mowbray and spin my little adventure for his benefit."

Half an hour later the speaker who, as the reader has guessed ere this, was our friend Duke Dado, ran nimbly up a stair in a dimly-lit hallway and rapped on a certain door.

In a minute or so the door was opened, and a handsome young man of twenty-two or twenty-three greeted him with a smile.

"You've had an adventure—I can see it by your eyes!" the youth exclaimed.

"I've had a ride, Mowbray," was the rejoinder, accompanied by one of Duke Dado's grins, and then the dwarf threw himself upon the edge of the bed from which Mowbray had just risen. "I guess we'll have to watch Floss pretty close from now on."

"What has happened?—tell me!" cried Mowbray losing color.

"Only this: Ferg Fowler has set another sleuth on the trail—a private watch-dog who is to play against the captain and all of us."

"Who is he?"

"Tom Keene, a man who is to be feared for his tact and low cunning."

Mowbray was silent for a moment.

"We are on top, now," he said. "The captain has made two excellent plays lately. Bowery Burt, Elegant Ahab's best man, and the Raven are behind the bars—safe. Our next stroke is against Ahab and his witch—then comes the great victory!"

"If Tom Keene fails," said Dado smiling.

"He must fail!—he shall!" cried Mowbray. "I want to see the person below us in possession of her rights. The papers and the diamond dragon which Mortimer Nogg or Elegant Ahab took from Fowler are in our hands. Captain Coldgrip found them secreted in Bowery Burt's quarters. They prove everything. But, as you say, this new man, Keene, must not play any of his hands out!"

"Where is the captain?" asked Dado.

"At work somewhere," was the reply. "Without that man the whole thing would collapse, and justice never be done."

At that very moment, in another part of the city, Elegant Ahab was startled by a hurried knock at his front door.

He sprung from his chair and rushed into the hall.

"By Jove! it is the signal!" he cried and then he opened the door.

A man leaped inside with a strange cry and turned on the head of the Dragon League.

"Bowery Burt!" ejaculated Elegant Ahab.

"There! don't give the winds my name

again!" said the man clutching the handsome sport's arm. "I've just escaped and—"

"Escaped from where?" and Elegant Ahab's eyes seemed ready to fly from his head.

"From the station-house to which I was taken by Captain Coldgrip. Don't ask me for the particulars. I'm here on almighty short time. I expect I've got the cops on my heels again. Where is Helen?"

"At Ferg Fowler's."

The announcement almost took Bowery Burt's breath.

"Great Scot! she is playing her game, then!" he said.

"Yes, and she says she will win, too."

"But not while Claude Coldgrip lives to thwart us!" was the reply. "That sleuth-hound is onto the whole scheme. Floss—I mean he knows more than he should!"

Elegant Ahab looked at his right bower, but said nothing.

"I'm wanted badly by the police, I know, but something's got to be done for us," Bowery Burt went on. "By the fires of Tartarus! we've got to turn on the hunter and make quick work of him! I guess I'm the man to do it, Ahab. Desperate remedies for desperate diseases. We've got to kill the bloodhound!"

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

##### RUN DOWN.

"Now let the sleuth of New York look out!"

This sentence, resolutely spoken, fell from the lips of a man who did not resemble the escaped prisoner of the station-house; but who was no one else, all the same,

The eventful night which has witnessed several of the most interesting plays in the deep gold game was vanishing before the onward march of another day.

Bowery Burt had left Elegant Ahab to his reflections, and had departed from the house with the last words of the preceding chapter on his lips:

"We've got to kill the bloodhound!"

And "the bloodhound" was Captain Coldgrip!

Bowery Burt saw the desperateness to which the game of the Dragon League had been reduced; he knew that without the removal of the New York spotter, his own little game would never prove successful.

He expected nothing less than the heralding of his escape to the whole city by the morning papers, which would appear on the streets shortly after daylight.

Like a hunted beast, but thoroughly disguised, he hurried along the almost deserted thoroughfares, with his eyes on the alert, seeing everything, as it were.

His escape had been effected by one of those peculiar combinations of fate and fortune which comes to the assistance of the desperate criminal when he does not look for it.

It is not our intention to detail it, and nothing need be said here more than that a half-drunken officer on duty had afforded Bowery Burt a chance to reappear in the play.

At last the Bowery sport dodged into an alley and was lost to sight.

Five minutes later he reappeared in the deserted room of an old house not unfamiliar to the reader—Papa Pangborn's.

Bowery Burt wanted a hiding-place for a short time, and he had found one.

He knew that the old Jew who had betrayed him had not ventured back, and he expected to have the whole of the infamous house all to himself.

In this he was not mistaken, for the house was as silent as the tomb, and Bowery Burt, like a hunted tiger in the heart of the jungle, saw the morning dawn once more.

A boy came along the street singing his newsy words, but the villain dared not buy. He wanted a paper worse than he needed bread; he was burning to see if some enterprising reporter had got onto his escape, but the temptation had to be resisted.

Let us leave him in the man-trap and return to another character of our story.

"Ah, boys, do you know what happened last night?" laughed Captain Coldgrip, as he entered a plainly furnished room and greeted Duke Dado, the dwarf, and the young man known as Mowbray.

The two tenants of the room started, and gave him an inquisitive look.

"The cage did not hold my first bird," continued the detective.

"Bowery Burt?" ejaculated Mowbray.

"The Bowery spider broke the web and got away."

"That is a misfortune," said Duke Dado.

"Only in one respect: He may warn the others," was the reply. "But I have more news than this. Ferguson Fowler has found the Percy heir at last."

"Impossible!" cried Mowbray.

"It cannot be!" exclaimed the dwarf.

"She is an inmate of his house at this moment," continued the detective, in all seriousness.

"Why, Floss is in the room below us," young Mowbray said, his face almost white and his eyes dilated. "You have told me that she is

the real Percy heir, but here you tell us that Ferg Fowler has found the true one, and that when Floss is still with us. How is this?"

A smile, faint but perceptible, appeared at the corners of the ferret's mouth.

"You would be astonished at the beauty of this new Frances Percy," he went on.

"When did you see her?"

"This morning, at one of the windows of the Fowler mansion."

"My God!" cried Mowbray: "what kind of a game is this, anyhow?"

"An almighty deep one, young man. The woman who is installed in Fowler's house as Frances Percy is Helen Hotspur, Elegant Ahab's partner."

"Ah! she can play it, captain!" cried Duke Dado. "If I wanted to beat the Fates, I'd put my cards into the hands of this woman. You must play boldly to beat her now. She is intrenched; she has not gone to Ferg Fowler without some startling evidence of success. Where is Elegant Ahab?"

"At the Palace, on Canal street. He is letting Helen play the game."

"And what do you intend doing?" asked Mowbray.

"I am going to see the cobra in the dove-cote," laughed the detective.

The two men started.

"Beware! Captain Keene is in Fowler's pay," said Duke Dado.

"Aha! I will not overlook the private shadow," was the reply.

"He is to play against you."

Captain Coldgrip drew a note-book from an inner pocket, and wrote rapidly on one page for a moment.

When he finished, he tore the leaf out and handed it to the dwarf.

"You will keep an eye out for Captain Keene," he said. "If the fellow is liable to effect anything, you will take this note to Captain Williams of the police."

Duke Dado glanced at the writing, and read:

"Have 'Captain' Tom Keene, private detective, arrested at once on a charge of blackmail. Hold him till I see you. COLDGRIFF."

"That is to be delivered to Captain Williams only when Keene promises trouble," said the city sleuth. "If he is in Ferg Fowler's pay, he will show it before long. Now I am going to see the new Frances Percy."

"Don't let her captivate you, captain," laughed the dwarf.

"For heaven's sake spoil her game!" said Mowbray, seriously. "If the Dragon League wins, Floss's cause is lost, you know."

"Ah, yes!—if it wins," was the reply, and the next moment Captain Coldgrip was going down a flight of steps to the street.

"By Jove! Helen Hotspur has played her boldest card," said the detective to himself.

"The strike is for ten millions, or nothing. I have seen women take chances before, but never one like this."

It was not long afterward when a man walked up the broad steps of the millionaire-banker's mansion and jerked the knocker.

The hour was not very early, and the people of the broad street were astir.

The door soon opened to the visitor.

"I am expected," said Captain Coldgrip, as he walked into the hall.

"Mr. Fowler is not up yet," the servant answered.

"I will wait for him," said the captain, stepping toward a door, but his arm was quickly clutched by the porter, and he was pulled back.

"The guest is in there, sir," he whispered.

"It is the lady who came last night, and she may not want to be disturbed."

"I'll attend to that," and the detective's eyes got a sudden flash as he broke from the porter and laid his hand on the knob of the door.

In another moment he had pushed the portal open, and the next second he stood face to face with a handsome woman who occupied the center of the magnificent parlor.

Her queenly figure was drawn to its full height, and her eyes were from the moment of his entrance riveted on the city ferret.

"Oh! it is you, is it?" exclaimed Captain Coldgrip, advancing.

There was no answer; the woman's eyes seemed to get added ferocity, and her fingers appeared to sink deep into her pink velvet palms.

What a dazzling beauty she was!

"I've got a tigress on my hands. I can see that," mentally ejaculated Captain Coldgrip.

"As Duke Dado says, I've got to play a bold game against this creature."

He walked to the heavily-curtained front window and threw back the sweeping folds of the lace shades.

The sunlight fell full upon Helen's face.

"Ah! I can see you now!" laughed the detective, turning upon her. "This is a bold move, woman, it is what I would call carrying the war into Africa."

For a moment she made no reply, then as she seemed to set her lips firm, she came toward him and said in a sharp tone:

"A bold game, eh? I never play any other kind. The case demands it."

"So it does," said Coldgrip quietly. "When I

saw you at the window this morning, I knew that Ferguson Fowler had a guest whom he had not invited."

"That is true. If I had waited for his invitation I would not be here. He doesn't like to see Frances Percy!"

"Frances Percy?" echoed the detective. "I thought this was the winning card the moment I saw you at the window."

"Then you don't believe?" cried Helen. "You don't credit my statement."

"No, Miss Hotspur."

The beautiful siren recoiled at the name, and the detective saw that the arrow had gone home.

"Come!" he continued, stepping toward her. "You are the person I have just called you. I know you well; you don't want me to show you up in the courts, nor even before the present master of this house. You always did play bold games. I could name two others as bold as this but they were not for ten millions, and one of them was a flat failure. You are Elegant Ahab's partner this time. Where did you pick up with that thief and gambler of two continents? You always lay your plans well. I know that you would not come to this house, much less intrench yourself here unless you had some alleged proof that you are Frances Percy, the child of the man who died in England some years ago. Say, my woman—have you a dragon on your left arm?"

"I've got the Percy mark," said Helen. "You did not think I would come here without it?"

"Oh, you're equal to any emergency," smiled the city sleuth. "Ferg Fowler hasn't owned you, though."

"Not yet, but he will! He dare not carry out one of the threats he made last night! I dare any man to eject me from this house before I am ready to depart."

"Not even when he knows that you are a mere adventuress?"

"Not even then!"

With his eyes fixed on the woman Captain Coldgrip took another step forward and threw up his hand.

"Don't touch me!" grated the gold serpent recoiling a step, and there flashed before the man-hunter the blade of a dagger clutched in her right hand. "I am here till gold drives me out. You know me; I see that. I confess to you that I am Helen Hotspur, but to Ferg Fowler I am Frances Percy, the heir of the man whose death brought him millions. Let him comply with my demands; let him pay me what we want and I will walk from his house, and let him alone. The real Frances Percy is dead, but he doubts it now."

"The real Frances Percy lives," exclaimed the detective.

"What's that?"

"The English major's heir is not dead."

"Ha! so you have a game for money, have you?" laughed Helen. "Why not play in with me, Captain Coldgrip?"

"And lose? No! Woman, I give you three minutes in which to quit this house."

Helen Hotspur lowered the dagger and looked into the detective's eyes.

"If I refuse—what?" she asked.

"I'll send you to the police with your history exposed."

A laugh, bold and defiant, was the answer.

"I'll dagger the man who touches me!" she said.

#### CHAPTER XXX.

##### A TERRIBLE BLOW.

THERE was the look of a tigress in the eyes of the woman who made this threat.

"Very well," said the city sleuth taking out his watch. "Three minutes is the time—not a second more!"

Helen made no movement.

"Aren't you going?" asked Captain Claude looking up into her face.

"No!"

"Your game can't win; you ought to be able to see it now."

"Because you have a person who is ready to play the role of Frances Percy?" cried the Queen of the Dragon League.

"Because I know where the true heir is!"

"You can't make Ferg Fowler believe that."

"I can and I will," was the answer. "Come! let me show you the door."

He took a step toward the adventuress, who drew back and raised her dagger.

"Beware!" she said. "Don't touch me, Captain Coldgrip. I will sting."

The detective laughed in her face, and came on determined.

He saw her eye, and the gleaming knife held above her head.

All at once his hand darted at her wrist, and the next moment the blade came down.

Fortunately for the detective, his bloodless hand arrested the arm midway, and the woman was thrown almost off her feet.

"No more of this, Helen!" he said sternly. "I want to tell you that the play of the Dragon League is at an end. The diamond dragon and the tattoo on your arm will amount to nothing. I will not turn you over to the police if you will go. Hunt up Elegant Ahab and play your future hands elsewhere."

She looked at him with the fury of a baffled prisoner, but his hand held her fast.

"You need not see Ferg Fowler before you go," he went on. "The banker is still in his room, and does not wish to encounter you. Go out peaceably, or, by the souls of the dead, woman, I'll force you before the courts on a charge that will make your blood run cold."

Their eyes met as Captain Coldgrip uttered the last words, and a pallor overspread Helen Hotspur's face.

He drew her across the parlor floor into the hallway, and thence to the door.

"This is to be your last attempt. Remember!" he said.

She said nothing.

The next moment the detective opened the door and pushed her gently out, then, with a look that spoke impressively, he shut the portal.

For a moment Helen stood on the step with clinched hands and eyes that seemed on fire.

"My last play? Not by a thousand miles, Captain Coldgrip!" she suddenly hissed. "I did not enter the game to be snuffed out by a man like you! If you think I am out of it, learn to your sorrow that you have judged me wrongly. Where is Bowery Burt? Elegant Ahab won't help me in the next move, though he is willing to share the spoil. I want a good eye and a quick hand, and Bowery Burt possesses both. The serpent may be trampled on, Captain Claude, but the death-sting is still alive!"

She gave the house a mad last look and turned away.

"So you have a Frances Percy, captain?" she laughed to herself. "Will you strike Ferg Fowler for five millions or ten? I played for the latter amount, and, if you had not appeared, I would have won too!"

Half an hour later this determined adventuress appeared to a man who had just been surrounding his handsome figure with smoke rings, and who was still taking his ease.

"Well, it was a failure, eh?" he said smiling as he looked up into her still blazing eyes.

"For the time," snapped the woman. "The man we must dispose of came on the scene."

"Captain Coldgrip?"

"The New York Vidocq!"

"What?" said Elegant Ahab amazed as he removed his cigar. "Are you going to try it again?"

"Yes! With this sleuth out of our way, the game can be won."

"What is the plan?"

"Ah! leave that to me," said Helen. "Where is Burt?"

"I don't know. He escaped from the station-house just before daylight—"

"The station? How did he get there?"

"Captain Claude caught him."

"Always Captain Claude!" said Helen, through her teeth. "It will continue to be thus till we settle with him. Tom Keenear, the private shadow, is in Ferg Fowler's employ. He is to find a certain girl now under Captain Coldgrip's protection somewhere. I overheard a certain conversation in Ferg Fowler's library last night. After that the detective went away to carry out the gold-bug's wishes. Do you know who that girl is said to be, Ahab?"

"No."

"Frances Percy."

Elegant Ahab gave a low incredulous laugh.

"Fowler more than half believes that she is the genuine," Helen went on. "If Captain Coldgrip produces her, with certain proof which he may have picked up, we will have to throw up our hand. Tom Keenear came to my room last night for the purpose of throwing me into the street; but when he looked over the pistol which he found thrust into his face, he went back. I'm not afraid of that man laying a hand on me; the other sleuth-hound is the dangerous foe."

"If we could find Captain Coldgrip's *protege*, we might yet play a winning hand, as you say, Helen," Elegant Ahab said.

"She must be found!" exclaimed the woman.

"But first we must reach Bowery Burt."

"The police are looking for him."

"That's nothing strange. It would be strange if he had the liberty of the city. He has a dozen haunts entirely unknown to the law dogs. We have a list of them, you know."

"Yes," said Elegant Ahab, pulling a piece of paper from his pocket. "Here they are."

Helen took the paper and began to study it.

"I will see what this yields," she said.

"You?"

"Why not? Do you think I am afraid to hunt Bowery Burt among his haunts?"

"Will you go as a woman?"

"Of course not! I will show you a mask that will deceive the most critical eye."

The next moment Elegant Ahab was again enjoying his cigar alone, and beyond a certain door occasional sounds told him that another room in the house was occupied.

After awhile the door opened, and a person who appeared to be a well-dressed young man with a neat black mustache, came forward.

Elegant Ahab looked surprised at the transformation, for he knew that the person who stood before him was Helen Hotspur.

"You'd eucher old Nick!" exclaimed the

handsome sport, as a twinkle appeared in the depths of Helen's eyes.

"Which I think must be another name for Captain Coldgrip," was the response. "Now I am off to find Bowery Burt. I will not come back until we have set a death-trap for the man we must catch."

Elegant Ahab shook his head slowly.

"You don't want to make any misdeal this time," he said.

"Leave that to me. When there are ten millions at stake, we must make no bad plays."

"It is ten millions or Sing Sing," laughed Ahab.

"I'll keep that in mind, and the outcome will be ten millions."

Helen Hotspur went first to the place from which Captain Coldgrip took Bowery Burt to the station, an event which we have witnessed.

She found no trace of the Bowery spider there.

Her next trip was to another part of the city, but it had the same result.

If she had looked beyond the door of Papa Pangborn's house she might have found the object of her search, for, like a lion waiting for night, Bowery Burt, hunted by the police, was still in hiding.

Haunt after haunt Helen visited, but without reward.

Her disguise seemed perfect, and although she came in contact with sharp-eyed men, nobody appeared to suspect her.

Nobody?

If the Dragon League Queen had employed her eyes in a certain direction, she would have seen that somebody was watching her. A little man with sparkling black orbs and a somewhat misshapen but wiry figure.

"Don't I know who she's hunting?" this person said to himself. "She's as anxious to find Bowery Burt as the police are. The captain said she was at Ferg Fowler's house this morning, but here she is, *en masque*, going from place to place, looking for her pard and tool, the spider of the Bowery."

Of course this watcher and spy was Duke Dado, the dwarf.

He had accidentally encountered Helen on the street, and his eyes, sharper than those of the rest had penetrated her shrewd disguise.

For Duke Dado to see Helen Hotspur in such plumes was to become her shadow, and he was playing his game with the cunning that characterized hers.

If the Dragon League Queen had suspected that her footsteps were being dogged by the dwarf, she would have turned on him in the drop of an eyelash.

Her great desire was to find Bowery Burt, on whom she relied for the desperate play against the Gotham sleuth.

From street to street Duke Dado followed the beautiful pal of the elegant sport.

At last the hunt seemed to come to an end.

Helen accosted a hackman and ordered him to drive her back to Canal street.

"That settles it," ejaculated the atom. "Helen gives up the hunt for the present and goes back to Ahab. Bowery Burt may come out like the owl to-night, but even then he will have to keep his eyes about him. Good-by, Helen. I don't thank you for the run you've given me."

Duke Dado did not lose sight of the hack until it turned a corner, and then he walked away.

Ten minutes later he went up a stair to the third story of a brick building and opened a door.

The little room before him was empty.

"Ho! Mowbray isn't here to hear my report," laughed the dwarf to himself; but just then he caught sight of a bit of paper lying on a table.

"Aha! this places him!" he continued. "He's just where I expected to find him—with Floss." And Duke Dado left the room and went down to the second floor.

A short distance from the landing was a door which stood an inch ajar, and the dwarf reached it in a couple of strides.

He pushed it open and found himself in a room partly darkened by the curtains being pulled down.

It was Floss's room, but the dwarf was not greeted by any one.

"Something is wrong here!" exclaimed the dwarf springing to one of the windows, and letting a flood of light into the place.

The next moment he started back with a horrified cry.

On the floor almost at his feet lay the body of Drake Mowbray, his friend, with splotches of blood in his face.

Floss was gone!

For a moment Duke Dado stood erect, a very statue of horror.

"Is this the work of the Bowery thug?" he exclaimed. "Has he eluded the police to come here and kidnap Floss? I'll make Mowbray answer, if he isn't dead!"

The next moment he was stooping over the youth on the floor with fingers at his wrist. A moment later the dwarf uttered an exclamation of joy.

"The boy's got life in him yet!" he said, and then he set to work to restore Mowbray.

This was a task of no little difficulty for the

dwarf, but after awhile his patient opened his eyes.

"Who did it?" asked Duke Dado eagerly. "Was it Bowery Burt?"

"No, a bigger man than he."

"My God! I have him!" exclaimed the atom shutting his hands. "Captain Keeneear, the private shadower, is carrying out Ferg Fowler's commands. Why didn't I deliver Captain Claude's demand on Captain Williams for the rascal's arrest?"

It was too late now, for the swoop of the private detective had been successful and almost fatal.

He would do anything for money.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE'S STROKE.

THIS is what had happened:

Duke Dado was on Helen Hotspur's trail, when a man, well dressed and apparently disguised, as his beard did not correspond with the shade of his hair, walked rather stealthily up the stair that led to the landing occupied by Floss.

The reader will remember that Dado the dwarf had found the girl by means of several glasses of claret which he adroitly got into Raven Rob at a Broadway *cafe*, and that he had removed her from the Raven's clutches, while the Raven himself had fallen into Captain Coldgrip's hands while trying to track the adroit little man.

The man who went up the stair toward Floss's little apartment, had the shrewd eyes of a scoundrel.

He seemed to know where to find the girl, for he walked straight to the proper door and knocked lightly.

A light step in the room beyond answered his summons, and a moment later he stood before Floss herself.

A slight movement of aversion on the girl's part was his greeting, but the man was not abashed.

"This is the place," he said, walking into the room without any invitation. "I want to speak with you a moment, miss. I am here on important business, and— Ah, I see you have company."

Floss's company was young Mowbray, who was not seen by the caller until that moment, hence the exclamation that greeted him.

"This gentleman is my friend," said the girl quickly. "This is Mr. Mowbray, and any business you may have with me can be transacted before him."

The man looked puzzled and displeased for a moment. It was evident he wanted to find the girl alone, and he had not bargained for the presence of this visitor.

Floss spoke firmly; she had determined that Mowbray should hear the stranger's business, or the stranger should take his departure with it unstated.

The man did not accept the chair to which the girl pointed him as she concluded.

On the contrary, he took a sudden step forward, his eyes fastened on the young couple.

"I can't talk with this gentleman here," he said, glancing from Mowbray to Floss.

"I prefer to remain," was Mowbray's reply, as if he had suddenly suspicioned the speaker.

"You do, eh?" rejoined the other, with insolence, and his hands seized the nearest chair. "If you want to stay, stay you shall!"

Drake Mowbray seemed to see what was coming, for he started up, but all at once the heavy chair came down upon his head, and he sunk like a dead weight to the floor!

The sudden attack and its results seemed to paralyze Floss.

The blow was like the fall of a thunderbolt.

"Not a cry of any kind!" said the stranger, darting forward and grasping her wrist before she could recover. "You don't want to bring the cops nor anybody else here. You want to obey me."

"Obey you?" echoed the girl. "Who are you?"

"Not a seraph, I suspect," was the reply, accompanied by a grin which seemed to give the man's eyes additional brightness. "Yes, my child, you want to obey me and no one else. The young man isn't dead. I tempered my blow to suit the occasion. You are the girl called Floss, eh?"

"I am Floss."

"Under Captain Coldgrip's protection?"

"Captain Claude is my friend."

"Just so! He is making a good card of you."

Floss looked surprised.

"You are talking in riddles now," she said.

"To you, perhaps, but the captain would know if he were here," was the rejoinder. "We'll not pursue this subject further just now. You are going with me."

"With you?" cried Floss, drawing back the length of his arm.

"With nobody else, my girl! You will accompany me and make no outcry. A word might prove dangerous. Remember that you have Captain Claude for a friend!"

"I am your prisoner, then?" said Floss.

"For the time."

"You came after me?"

"Yes."

As he answered, the stranger started toward the door and Floss was forced to follow by the clutch of his hand.

They went down the stair together and out into the street.

"Who is this man and why does he want me?" she asked herself. "He is neither Bowery Burt nor the Raven; but I am in his power just the same. In God's name, when is this game to be played out?"

On the first corner below the house the man who had captured Floss exchanged significant looks with a hackman whose vehicle stood close to the curb.

"Get in, my child," the stranger said to Floss as he opened the hack door, and when she had entered he sprung in after her.

The interior of the vehicle was dark, so dark that Floss could no longer see the features of the man.

"He does not want me to see the route he takes," passed at once through the girl's mind. "He knows that this part of the city is familiar to me, and he would keep me in the dark as much as possible."

The carriage going at a good rate of speed, rattled on for some minutes and when it halted at last and the door was opened, Floss found herself in a dingy alley and close to the portals of a brick building.

In a moment she was helped out by the man and the door was opened by some person on the inside.

Floss was ushered into a poorly lighted apartment, but was immediately led up a flight of steps into another room which was lighter and larger.

"This is the place," said the stranger, speaking for the first time since entering the carriage. "We are home, Floss."

"Home?" echoed the girl, starting. "This is not home."

"I'd like to know what else it is!" said the man, laughing. "You won't stay here for long, I hope. What did Captain Coldgrip intend doing with you?"

Floss gave the man a searching look, but said nothing.

"Don't want to talk, eh?" continued her captor. "When did the captain expect to play his card against Ferg Fowler?"

The girl could not suppress a start at the mention of the banker's name.

A new light seemed to flash across her brain.

"Is this the man Drake Mowbray was telling me about just before he came?" she asked herself. "Can this be Thomas Keeneear, the private detective who is said by Dado to be in Ferg Fowler's employ for a certain purpose? If it is, I am in the power of an unscrupulous man, for I know Tom Keeneear by reputation. I'll try him, anyhow."

Then she looked straight into the man's eyes, and said:

"Is Captain Coldgrip's play as black as yours?"

The man started: he could not help it.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"I mean, did Ferg Fowler hire you to abduct me, or, are you working on your own hook, Mr. Keeneear?"

The stranger did not know what to do; but the girl's quick eye saw him bite his lip.

All at once he burst into a coarse, triumphant laugh.

"By Jove! you send your arrows home, I see," he exclaimed. "I might as well unmask," and his beard fell to the floor, showing him a smooth-faced, good-looking fellow with wonderful black eyes of strong penetrating powers. "Yes, I am Tom Keeneear, and I am playing a game of my own. Your friend, the captain, is shrewd at some things, but he leaves poor soldiers on guard sometimes. You are the trump card in the deck he owns; I have found this out. He is going to play you on Ferg Fowler for the biggest stakes ever put up in Gotham. He, ha! my supposed heiress; do you think the captain will strip the table when he throws down his hand?"

A flush of indignation overspread the girl's face.

"He is playing no game for self," she cried, advancing toward the man quietly watching her. "He knows who I am and how I have been treated all these years. Captain Claude suspected the truth before Ferg Fowler engaged him to hunt the Dragon League down."

"What truth?" asked Keeneear affecting ignorance.

"Ah! you know without asking me," was the reply. "You know that I am Frances Percy, the real owner of much of the wealth claimed by Ferguson Fowler at this day."

The private detective changed color and a thrill passed over him.

"Great Jehu! I see now why Ferg Fowler wants this girl out of the road!" he said to himself. "If I am not mistaken, I've made a ten-strike to-day, and if I don't feather my nest, may I never pass the portals of bliss! If this is the real Frances Percy, she's worth her weight in gold, and to me, at that!"

"So you are the Percy heir, eh?" he said, leaning toward Floss. "They used to call you Floss Burton, didn't they?"

"Yes, when I occupied the home of Bowery Burt on Chatham street."

"I thought so. You're the decoy the old rascal used to have."

Floss blushed deeply and dropped her eyes.

"Never mind," laughed the private shadow. "We'll not go back to these old times, but we'll keep pretty close to the present. By Jove! you'd make a good mistress of a mansion like Ferg Fowler's. You'd have to dispossess Nydia, the woman he has raised."

"I'd give her a share," said Floss.

"Oh, you'd be liberal, I see!" said Keeneear. "What would you do with the banker himself?"

A sudden pallor chased every vestige of color from Floss's cheeks; her eyes flashed with a light that startled the sleuth.

"Don't ask me!" she said. "My brain burns when I think of that man and what I believe he did once."

"In America?" ventured Tom Keeneear.

"No, in England," said the girl.

"You can't try a man in this country for what he did across the water."

"That is true, but the law is not always vengeance," was the quick rejoinder. "I have no good thoughts for Ferg Fowler. How could I have when I know his millions are mine, and when I think by what infamous means he got them."

"You should be certain of all this, Floss."

"I am certain! The proof of his work is living, and in this city! Captain Coldgrip is going to see that I get justice."

"Aha! the captain again!" exclaimed the private detective, with a sneer. "He is very disinterested just now. But I must leave you here awhile."

"Where am I?"

The question came without an effort to the girl's lips.

"In the city," was the reply, accompanied by a look which Floss understood. "I have as good a right to play a game as Captain Claude. I can take you into your inheritance as easily as he."

"But you do not intend to! I know you, Thomas Keeneear."

"All right!" he cried, springing forward and halting before the girl, who did not recoil an inch. "What do I care for your claims, so long as I can feather my nest? I see a gigantic scheme ahead, and I never let an opportunity slip. This house is your prison until I see fit to let you out. Nobody knows where you are. The man who drove the hack is my tool, and will never 'peach.' Captain Claude and your friends can never find you, for I need not come back here any more. This house is a grave just as much as one in Greenwood is. You can make up your mind to stay. Miss Percy—or Floss—whichever name you like best. Tom Keeneear did not come into the game till late; but, by Heavens! he holds the hand that finally rakes in the stakes. I'll be the Croesus of the play ere long!"

And his laugh was demonism itself to the poor girl.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### THE DEADLY DECOY.

Two days passed away, and in the early part of the night of the second, Captain Coldgrip, the detective, presented himself before a young man who occupied a small room in a certain part of the city.

"What news from Floss?" asked the youth, eagerly.

The city sleuth smiled faintly.

"I have none," he said.

Drake Mowbray shut his lips hard, and his eyes were seen to flash.

"Is Tom Keeneear to prove too much for us?" he asked, with a show of censure.

"Wait and see," said the detective. "I have never lost a game yet, and I say this with pride. Floss has been missing ever since she was taken away by the man who gave you the stunning blow. That man was the private detective; there's not the least doubt of that."

"But what has become of him?" exclaimed Mowbray.

"Ah! that is the question," was the reply, and then Captain Claude was silent for a moment. "This fellow is a person of manifold disguises," he went on. "I am certain that he has not gone to Ferg Fowler with his report. But, look here! I have found an advertisement which interests me."

As the detective spoke, he drew a paper from his pocket and pointed to a certain place in the "rent column."

Mowbray read as follows:

"FOR RENT.—Two rooms, or the whole of No. — Canal street. Possession given immediately. Apply on the premises."

"Aha! Elegant Ahab and Queen Helen have given up 'the Palace!' exclaimed the young man.

"It looks that way."

"Your threats to the woman at Ferg Fowler's have frightened the League from the game. I wish we could also say that we knew where Floss is. Do you think the beautiful pair have left the city?"

"I cannot say. Helen Hotspur is not one of those women to turn from ten millions, as long as she can get vengeance or money. If they have given up the house it is because the place was liable to get too hot for them. We must keep track of the pair, for awhile at least. I want to fasten the bars on Bowery Burt who is, after all, the most dangerous person of the lot."

"Are you going to investigate to-night?"

"Yes."

"What orders have you for me?"

"Remain here for Duke Dado's report. The dwarf is liable to turn up at any time and with important news, too. When Ferg Fowler imported that misshapen piece of humanity, he did not think that he was helping to seal his own doom."

Ten minutes later Mowbray was once more the only occupant of the room and the detective was down on the street.

"It was by the merest chance that I saw the advertisement about the abandonment of 'The Palace,' he said to himself. 'The League must not get entirely beyond my reach for I have not done with Helen Hotspur and her accomplices. I may want a confession from her lips before the courts, and I may have to put Elegant Ahab behind the bars at Auburn. The guilt they have done makes the gallows their due."

Captain Coldgrip made his way to Canal street as rapidly as possible.

Night had fairly settled over the city, and he was only one of a hurrying throng of people, but for all that he was regarded by a pair of eyes as keen as his own.

The house formerly occupied by the Dragon League looked deserted to the detective.

There was no longer a gleam of gaslight beyond the shutters, and he wondered who would answer his ring.

When near the building, he was suddenly deserted by the person who had dogged his steps for some distance. The spy darted down the by-street nearest the house and was soon lost to sight near Simon Peter's saloon where we have seen Duke Dado encounter Bowery Burt on a certain occasion.

Captain Claude went up the steps of "The Palace" and announced his presence there in the usual way.

He was not noticed for several moments, and then the inside bolt of the door was withdrawn and a small woman of an uncertain age made her appearance.

The detective gave the woman a searching look and went in.

"You advertise rooms for rent?" he said.

"Oh, yes—yes. Do you want rooms?"

"I might take them if they suit. Don't you find permanent renters here?"

"Not very permanent ones, sir," said the woman, showing her teeth.

"What became of your last ones?"

"Moved out."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Their time was up, and they had found other rooms further up-town. I'll show you their apartments; they'll suit you, I know."

The woman appeared honest, though she spoke rapidly and with some trepidation as it afterward seemed to the detective.

"Are they on the second landing?" he asked, as the woman moved toward a flight of steps.

"Just at the head, sir. I want you to see them."

Captain Coldgrip followed the woman upstairs.

"I'll pretend to inspect the rooms, and then I'll attack her about her last renters," he said to himself.

At the top of the stairs was a hall along which the detective saw a door which stood partly ajar.

The gas burning in the lower hall revealed ed this.

"This is the front parlor, sir," said the landlady, laying her hand on the knob. "Walk right in and I'll turn on the gas."

The next moment the city sleuth had crossed the threshold, and the next the door closed with a snap that sent his hand without effort to the butt of his revolver!

Entrapped!

The thought went through him like the pain of a dagger!

The shutting of the door was followed by the sudden lighting of the room, and Captain Coldgrip found himself covered by three six-shooters, behind which were three pairs of merciless and glistening eyes.

"The third trap holds!" laughed one of the trio, and the detective saw the well-known features of Bowery Burt. "I haven't been hiding from the cops these few days for nothing, captain. My wits were at work all the time, and this is the result. My friends here are glad to see you."

On either side of the Bowery spider stood Elegant Ahab, faultlessly attired, and the beautiful Helen Hotspur.

The woman could not conceal her great triumph.

"This isn't the millionaire's palace," she said

to the still astonished captain. "I don't leave this house at your threat and command. Whose game is it now, my tracker? Where is the real Frances Percy to-night, eh?"

The detective had not opened his mouth since the startling confrontation.

He had recovered from the surprise and was now looking calmly into the cocked weapons that completely covered him.

He had fallen into one of the subtlest snares ever spread for human game, and at that moment he wondered who the woman was who had admitted him to the trap.

"There is to be no escape from this web, captain," said Bowery Burt with sternness. "We can't afford to let you go. The decoy to Papa Pangborn's failed, and you escaped from Mrs. Hoyle's 'cupboard,' but here the trail must end. You are too dangerous to be let run at large. We can't afford to have you loose-footed; we have too much at stake."

"Entirely too much, captain. This is no pastime work!" and the speaker, who was Elegant Ahab, laughed at the thought of what his dangerous little cones had effected. "We weren't certain that the advertisement would catch you. It picked fifty renters up, but we didn't want 'em. You're the fish for whom we baited the hook."

"Very well! your dupe is here," said the detective. "I acknowledge that the play is yours once more, Elegant Ahab."

"You are mistaken, Claude Coldgrip!" said Queen Helen. "It is ours forever! You are now standing on a trap which has been prepared for you. My left hand touches a cord which I have but to jerk slightly to send you down through space which is not the widow Hoyle's cupboard. Move a foot, or attempt to leave the spot where you stand and we will riddle you. For you the game is at an end. The woman whom you forced from Ferg Fowler's mansion will go back there with a better hand than the one she held before. We never give up a game, and the Dragon League does not intend to quit this one until it has forced millions from the Gotham Croesus. He will not see his secret exposed if his money will purchase silence. He doesn't want the world to know just how Major Percy died. He would give his life-blood to keep the dread crime back. Did a League like ours ever have such a hold on a man before? I think not. All your work has been for nothing. You don't know Elegant Ahab's past history. You American detectives shrewd as you are have never unraveled it. He is an ex-Scotland Yard detective, and, as such, he knows something about Fowler's crime."

Captain Coldgrip gave Elegant Ahab a quick searching look.

"I don't believe it," he said. "Scotland Yard detectives are not blackmailers."

Elegant Ahab flushed.

"Enough of this!" he said through his teeth. "We need not parley another moment, Captain Coldgrip. The game is over—your part of it, at least. Jerk the death-cord, Helen."

"In a second," said the city Cleopatra. "I want that man to tell me one thing before he is ushered into eternity. Tell it solemnly, before God, Claude Coldgrip. Is the girl you have in hand really Frances Percy?"

A smile came to the corners of the detective's mouth, and his magnificent figure seemed to straighten another inch.

"Pull your cord and let the future answer," he said.

"Tell me now. Why go to your death with your lips sealed? The keeping of the truth now can do you no good. Is your protegee the heir of Ferg Fowler's victim?"

"I have given you the only answer you shall hear from my lips!" was the determined rejoinder.

Helen's eyes seemed transformed into balls of fire.

"You shall never be asked again!" she said. "New York loses her best ferret, and to-night records the only play you did not win."

The quick eye of the detective saw her white fingers close more firmly on the cord they clutched, and at the same moment Bowery Burt and Elegant Ahab looked with new ferocity over the barrels of their revolvers.

"It is coming—the last play of the Dragon League!" passed through Captain Claude's mind.

He seemed to brace himself for the unknown ordeal which could not be averted.

In another second he would know all.

All at once Helen Hotspur jerked the cord, and instantly the floor gave way under the detective's feet!

Despite his coolness a cry of horror was forced from his lips, and an instant later he was falling!

In the room below he struck, but his weight seemed to part the floor beneath him, and he fell down—down—down again.

It was a repetition of the descent down Mrs. Hoyle's cupboard, but this time it was more dangerous.

He struck in a second, as it seemed, and with terrible force.

Darkness and unconsciousness came.

After a while a light descended into the trap that had received the bravest detective in New York.

Leaning over the trap-door were the faces of two men, one handsome and smooth, and the other bearded and evil-eyed.

The light showed them the body of a man on the ground.

"At the end of the trail—dead!" exclaimed the bearded man.

"Thank fortune! the last trap got the city ferret!" was the response. "Who can euer us now, Bowery Burt?"

"Nobody. The one great baffle is out of the way!"

The two faces disappeared, the trap was shut, and Captain Coldgrip was left to himself.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### DADO, A MOUNTAIN.

"Now for the next cast for fortune!" said the beautiful woman into whose presence the two men stepped after they had shut the trap. "It is my turn again to make another play."

"What is it to be, Helen?" asked Elegant Ahab.

"I shall begin anew where I left off."

"At Ferg Fowler's house?"

"Why not?"

The handsome chief of the Dragon League turned to his male companion.

"Do you suggest a play of this kind, Burt?" said Ahab.

"Let Helen go," answered Bowery Burt with a faint smile at his lips.

"Who will drive me out now?" exclaimed the woman. "Claude Coldgrip is off the trail forever, and Tom Keenear, the private sleuth, dare not molest me. When I go back to the millionaire's mansion it will be to stay until the League has won the game. You need not go, Elegant Ahab. I don't fight my way to success with pastilles," she spoke sarcastically. "You need not accompany me."

Elegant Ahab gave the woman a sharp look.

"Well, go you shall," he said. "I'll order a carriage."

In a little while Helen Hotspur was once more on her way to Ferg Fowler's home, and the two men stole from the Canal street den into the street.

They were satisfied that the third trap had been sprung successfully on the city detective, for the light let down into the deep cellar had convinced them beyond doubt that Captain Coldgrip had reached the end of his great trail.

Elegant Ahab went to one of the glaring gambling dens of the city, and Bowery Burt, in an impenetrable disguise began to hunt for Floss.

If he could only find the girl he would yet succeed in the game he had planned, even perfected, in all its details. He believed that Ferg Fowler would resist Helen's threats and demands until he (Bowery Burt) could find Floss, when, with the real heir, he could demand and get for himself all he wanted.

There was no limit to the money he intended to force from Ferg Fowler.

Bowery Burt had no scruples; he would stoop to any crime when aroused; the murder of Foxy at Papa Pangborn's, a crime detailed in the course of our romance, was only one of a long series of evil deeds.

He did not know Floss's value until after fate or fortune had thrown him in with Elegant Ahab and Helen. Then, with the shrewdness of the adept criminal, he saw that the girl he had raised was more than Floss the Chatham street fairy.

The tattooed dragon on her shoulder told him that there were millions in a certain game if played with his accustomed coolness, and we have seen how his theft of the Fowler papers and the diamond dragon was a part of his well-laid plan.

But Floss was lost, and it was his duty to find her as soon as possible, or before Helen could get through with the business she had in hand.

"I hope Ferg Fowler has a giant at the door who will pitch you into the street, Queen Helen!" ejaculated Bowery Burt. "It takes a good deal of coolness for you to go back after your ejection, but, by Jupiter! you've got all that's needed, I guess. Go and try it over. If you don't succeed mebbe I will, and it'll be for Bowery Burt, too!"

Meanwhile Helen had proceeded in the carriage to Fowler's mansion.

Her eyes got the old flash of determination as she mounted the steps and raised the knocker.

"No ejection this time, Mr. Fowler!" she exclaimed. "The thumb-screws are to be put on till they draw money or blood. Ah! here we are! I am to be admitted, if not welcomed."

The next moment the beautiful adventuress saw the door open, and a strange face greeted her.

It was not Jason's, for that man, the League's tool, had received his papers some time previous.

The butler held the door open and bowed as Helen walked in.

"Mr. Fowler?" she inquired.

"He is up-stairs, but you are requested to wait in the library."

Requested to wait!

Helen started slightly at the wording of the sentence, but did not choose to discuss.

"Tell him that he is wanted in the library," she said, and the man disappeared.

"Inside again!" parted the siren's lips as she moved toward the library. "I am not to be turned out by anybody! The Dragon League scores its final success to-night or goes to pieces! It will win!"

Helen opened the library door and entered.

The desk lamp was burning with some power, and the appointments of the room were plainly seen.

"Nobody here! I know this place!" ejaculated Queen Helen, and then she walked toward the millionaire's desk with a satisfied smile.

All at once a slight noise struck her ear and the next moment the woman saw that Ferg Fowler's arm-chair had an occupant.

At first the object did not look larger than a lap-dog, but Helen Hotspur speedily saw that it was a human being.

"My God!" cried the woman, recoiling with her eyes riveted upon the person in the chair. "When did you come into the game?"

Strange words were these, but they bubbled without effort to the surface.

A mocking laugh with a devilish ring was the first reply Helen got.

"I've been in the game all along. I saw it opened in England."

"You must be Duke Dado."

"I am the illustrious Duke," smiled the person in the chair, and his eyes twinkled as they looked up into Helen's face.

"Did you come back to finish up the move?"

"What move?" asked Helen, indignant over the dwarf's impertinence.

"Why, the one you made the other night, or when Captain Claude came on."

"Beware! you don't want to be too fast!" cried the woman, leaning forward quickly.

"You have come back to the man you left some time ago—"

"It looks that way."

"You know that you are deep in the English crime, and I say boldly to you, Duke Dado, that you don't want to interfere with me."

The dwarf showed his teeth in a fearless grin.

"I see you're still in the gold game," he laughed. "By Jerusalem! Queen Helen, you beat the mischief in a scheme of this kind. Do you want to see Mr. Fowler?"

"What is that to you?" cried the woman, clinching her hands.

"Not a great deal, maybe, but very important to you, perhaps. Maybe you want to see Nydia?"

Helen Hotspur drew back with an exclamation on her lips.

"No, you don't want to meet Mr. Fowler's ward, I see," continued Duke Dado. "Since it is the banker himself whom you wish to interview, I'll conduct you to him."

Duke Dado left the chair and waved Helen toward the door with a mock politeness that was cutting.

She did not stir.

"I'll wait for him here," she said. "Ferg Fowler must come to me."

"Oho! because you regard yourself mistress of the situation, eh?" cried the dwarf, drawing his little figure proudly up.

"I am!" said Helen flashingly.

Dado stepped back and looked at her without a word. There was insolence and insult in his snapping black eyes, and Helen felt like flying at his throat and hurling him through the window into the street.

"If you wait for Mr. Fowler here, you will not see him," said the dwarf at length.

"Is—he—sick?"

The woman's breath seemed to go in gasps with the words.

She thought of her last whirlwind-like interview with the millionaire banker. What if the attack had thrown him into severe illness? Such a thing would not be uncommon.

"Ferguson Fowler is not sick, but he can't see you here," the dwarf said.

"Then the man has gone back to madness," said Helen to herself.

"Where is he?"

"Up-stairs in his private room."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Then I will see him."

The eager dwarf stepped nimbly across the floor and opened the door. Helen passed out and up the broad steps, watched like a hawk by Duke Dado.

The strange little man led her to a door that was shut, and when he opened it, Helen saw that the room beyond was small and rather dimly lighted.

"Here's your man!" the dwarf said, admitting the adventuress. "You see now why he could not meet you in the library."

Helen Hotspur leaned forward with intense curiosity in her eyes.

The next moment she uttered a startling cry.

"Great God!" she started back. "This man is dead!"

From gazing at the man seated bolt upright

in a chair, with the gaslight on a pale and ghastly face, she turned upon the dwarf.

Duke Dado had a triumphant smile at his lips.

"Dead? he's nothing else!" said the little man.

"Why didn't you tell me so?"

"I didn't have to."

"When did he die?"

"This afternoon, at four o'clock. It was suicide, Queen Helen."

The woman riveted her eyes upon the man in the chair, and watched him till her own brilliant orbs got a flash of triumph.

Duke Dado saw it.

"He left a lot of papers," the dwarf said.

"Where are they?"

"Under lock and key!"

"In the safe in the library?" cried Helen, starting forward.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" grinned Dado.

"You'd like to see the confession of this man who killed Major Roger Percy in England for his fortune. You'd like to see what he has to say about you who came here the other night, and tried to bleed him for ten millions, claiming that you were the major's heir! Yes, those papers would be worth their weight in diamonds to you, if you could only get your hands on them; but I guess you won't."

The woman before the dwarf changed color several times; she quivered with poorly-suppressed excitement, and the keen eyes of the little man told him that he was in danger, but he resolutely stood his ground.

"Ferg Fowler was warm yet when I came," Duke Dado went on. "The deed had not been done twenty minutes; the papers lay before him, and I put them away. I came here to watch for a man whose trail I want to find. I am still waiting for Tom Keenear, the private Shadow of the Bowery. I guess your game is played out. Helen."

The last words seemed to transform the beautiful woman into a tigress.

"Played out? not yet! You don't know what I will prove if they force me to it," she exclaimed.

"You can prove nothing against Ferg Fowler more than he has confessed," was the answer.

"He is dead and beyond reach of the law. I can prove that you are not Frances Percy, but Helen Hotspur of the Dragon League, and Elegant Ahab's pal. I can also prove that your other companion is Bowery Burt, thief—murderer! I can open the doors of Sing Sing to you on a dozen counts. Captain Coldgrip will find Floss, and then there'll be justice at last."

"Captain Coldgrip?" laughed the woman derisively. "Ha, ha! You are behind the times, Duke Dado! Get out of my path or I'll choke you to death."

The little man turned and threw open the door.

"I was prepared for Tom Keenear, but I will not let you slip through my fingers!" he said.

Helen took a step forward but stopped suddenly and then recoiled.

"Come in, gentlemen," the dwarf said to some one.

The next moment two policemen entered the room and advanced toward Helen.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### CONCLUSION.

THAT same night, after an absence of several hours, Bowery Burt went back to the Canal street "palace."

"Mebbe that's a clew to Floss on the spotter's corpse," he said. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

The Bowery villain let himself into the house by a secret back way, and proceeded to the pit into which Captain Coldgrip had been thrown by means of the trap sprung by the Queen of the Dragon League.

The dark lantern carried by the man soon threw a strong light into the place, but all at once an exclamation of total surprise parted his lips.

"Great Cæsar's ghost! what has become of the ferret?"

Bowery Burt stood in the cellar or pit like a person suddenly struck dumb. His sloe-black eyes dilated and his breath went in gasps.

"Gods! has the man nine lives like a cat?" he cried, and then certain that he was the only occupant of the cellar he darted out.

"I must see Mrs. Simpson about this. She remained in the house after we left."

He went out upon the street again and dodged into the nearest alley. Five minutes later he appeared abruptly to a keen-eyed woman who started on seeing him.

This was the woman who had admitted Captain Coldgrip to "the palace" and the trap.

"The man is gone!" said Bowery Burt. "Captain Coldgrip is at large, if you haven't buried him."

"I didn't touch him," replied the woman, turning white.

"Then he is on the trail once more!"

"And I leave New York before morning."

"That's right—follow Mrs. Hoyle," laughed Bowery Burt derisively, and before his accomplice could answer he was out of her sight.

"I've got somebody on my track; I feel it," the man said to himself when he was a few squares from the place. "If it is the Gotham sleuth by heavens! we'll play our game out here."

He walked slowly and threw sharp looks back.

The gaslight was strong and the street had its usual pedestrians.

For a moment Bowery Burt, whose eyes were the keenest of the keen, saw nobody suspicious, but at last he noticed a man a few steps away.

"Just as I thought," he muttered through his teeth. "The ferret is after the game."

All at once the eyes of the two men met, and Bowery Burt's hand moved quickly toward a hip pocket.

"Hands down!" suddenly rung out the voice of the tracker, and up went his revolver as he spoke. "Stand where you are, Bowery Burt, or the League loses its thug!"

The rascal saw his peril.

"In the toils once more!" he growled, as the man came toward him looking into his clouded face over the barrel of the leveled six-shooter.

In a second they met.

"Can't you be killed, Captain Coldgrip?" exclaimed Bowery Burt.

"Not by the traps you set," was the response accompanied by the detective's cool smile. "Once more to the station, Bowery Burt. This time there will be no boosy officer on guard."

The cleverly captured rascal had to beat down his rage as best he could. He was once more in the hands of the man he feared—the detective who seemed born to beat him at his deepest game.

"Your appearance on the street diverted me from another important trail," said Captain Coldgrip, looking into his prisoner's face between the scene of capture and the station-house.

"What trail?" asked the Bowery villain, doggedly.

"I am going to find Floss to-night."

"Where is she?"

"In the hands of Ferg Fowler's new tool—Tom Keenear, the private detective."

Bowery Burt shut his hands and gave vent to a strange sound.

"Why didn't I find it out by dogging him? I saw that man awhile ago!" he muttered.

Captain Coldgrip smiled.

"Fate decreed that you should drop into my hands," he said.

"Curse fate!" grated Bowery Burt. "It has been against me ever since this game opened! I hope Helen will fail with her play."

"Ah! where does Helen play next?"

"At Ferg Fowler's."

"Then she will find a silent antagonist."

The scoundrel started and gave his captor a quick look.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Fowler is dead."

"Dead?" cried Bowery Burt, recoiling from the detective's gaze.

"Dead by his own hand!"

"Then the game is up."

The voice of the speaker was tinted with despair.

"It is up, and you have more than lost it," was the response.

Bowery Burt dropped his eyes, and was silent for some minutes.

"Floss is Frances Percy," he said when he looked up. "You must suspect this, captain."

"I know it! I know that Ferg Fowler played a terrible hand in England some years ago, that he deliberately killed his friend, Roger Percy, and made it appear a suicide; that he hid the true will and forged another which gave him the bulk of the property; that he gave Mary May Cable, the child's nurse, ten thousand pounds to run off with the girl, Frances—"

"Jehu! was it that bad?" interrupted Bowery Burt.

"Yes, and worse still. He pretended to have a letter from the nurse saying that the child was dead. It, too, was a forgery. Mary May Cable is in this city, and has been for five years."

"Where did you get all this?" asked the astonished villain.

"I unearthed a good deal of it; the rest came from Dado's lips, and the confession left by Ferg Fowler. If the Dragon League had not played its hand, he would be living now. He discovered that his crime was known, and that I had found Floss."

"Give her her own, captain!" cried Bowery Burt.

"She shall be in the banker's mansion before morning."

"That is, if you find Tom Keenear!" laughed the Shadow.

"I will find him."

About an hour after the detective's successful play against Elegant Ahab's right bower, a man

in the act of darting into a hallway, was caught by a hand which threw him half-way round.

"What does this mean?" flashed the person thus suddenly checked, and then he started visibly as he caught this confronter's eye.

"We'll go up together, Captain Keeneear," was the response.

"Ah! you know me, and you have reason to."

"Yes, I know you, Claude Coldgrip; but I'm no thief to be treated thus," and the private detective, caught at last, drew back the length of the arm by which he was held. "What is wanting?"

"I want Floss."

Tom Keeneear put on a look of indignation.

"Floss who?"

"Frances Percy, if you don't recognize our new gold queen by the name of Floss," smiled the detective. "Come! don't play with me, but go up-stairs and show me the girl."

"Or what?"

"Or I'll turn you over to the police on a charge that'll chill your blood."

Cornered by the New York ferret, Tom Keeneear bit his lips and turned toward the rather dimly-lighted stair midway down the hall.

A moment later the two men were climbing the steps together.

"You've been hunting me?" suddenly said the private shadow.

"Yes."

"Did you come from Ferg Fowler's tonight?"

"I was there."

"What has transpired? Something has, I know. I saw two policemen enter the house, but I was too sharp to follow them. Wasn't it a trap for me, captain?"

The detective could not suppress a smile.

"A trap it was!" cried Keeneear. "Well, it didn't catch me. Who was waiting for me there?"

"Duke Dado."

"Ferg Fowler's accomplice in the English crimes?"

"He wasn't very deep in them; but he knew Ferg Fowler's secret."

They were nearly at the top of the stair now, and Captain Coldgrip was next to the wall.

"I'll do it!" flashed through the private detective's brain.

The following second he turned upon the sleuth, but his throat was clutched before he could make his play.

"I expected this, captain," laughed Coldgrip, as he forced him over the banister. "It was your last chance, I know, but I have to play my trump and spoil it. I'm sorry, really sorry, captain! You'll pardon me, won't you, eh?"

There was no reply, for Tom Keeneear saw that his game was up.

Three minutes afterward the New York Vidocq dragged a half-conscious man across the threshold of a small room and surprised a beautiful young girl, who greeted him with a thrilling exclamation of joy.

It was Floss—Frances Percy now, gentle reader!

"I have one more play to make," said the detective, as he left Floss in the care of young Mowbray, and went down into the street again, some distance from the scene of Tom Keeneear's discomfiture.

"Ferg Fowler commissioned me to run the Dragon League to earth, and it is almost done. There is but one of the dangerous trio at large—the man in kids and the worker in pastilles. I think I know where to find him."

And he did.

Elegant Ahab, scrupulously dressed and with waxed mustache, was one of a party of players at the famous tables of a Broadway gambling palace.

A man walked into the place and toward him. The elegant sport, deep in the game, saw no one.

All at once a hand fell like a paw of velvet upon his shoulder; the thief in kids looked up.

"You're the man!" said the detective in low but thrilling tones. "I have the honor to say, Elegant Ahab, that the Dragon League is no more."

We are at the end of our story, and there is but little to add here.

Floss came into possession of her rights, and liberally rewarded all who helped her to obtain them.

A few months ago she became the wife of young Mowbray, who had helped Captain Coldgrip frequently during his great trail, and who had met her first when she was only Floss of Chatham street.

Ferg Fowler was dead, and the law could not punish him for the secret crime that orphaned Percy's heir.

Nydia, the banker's ward, was given a fortune by the girl who supplanted her as mistress of the mansion, and her reign there passed away.

Bowery Burt came to trial for his inhuman murder of Foxy at Papa Pangborn's, and thanks to the old Jew's testimony, the noose strangled him in the Tombs.

As for the Raven, Foxy's companion, whom we last saw adroitly captured in a cab by Cap-

tain Coldgrip, he went to Sing Sing on an old charge, and to-day inhabits that famous institution.

Helen Hotspur was too dangerous a woman to let run at large. Her last great game for gold had failed, and her cool work told that she would not hesitate to take life to further her ends.

She turned out to be the cast-off wife of Tom Keeneear, private detective, and when she came into court to be tried for the attempted murder of Captain Coldgrip, her whole history and the plots of the Dragon League came to the surface.

Her dazzling beauty did not save her; the inexorable law had its way, and the same train that took the Raven to Sing Sing carried her thither, with a man who wore kids and had a waxed mustache—Elegant Ahab!

Our almost forgotten friend Mrs. Hoyle, the Amazonian candy-seller of Houston street, fled the city shortly after the detective's experience in her "cupboard;" and Tom Keeneear soon followed her example.

Papa Pangborn narrowly escaped a sentence; his testimony against Bowery Burt was all that saved him.

Duke Dado, the dwarf, did not remain long in New York after the collapse of the game. His connection with Ferg Fowler in England put him under a cloud, and although he would not have been molested because of the assistance he had rendered American justice, he chose to leave, and probably put an ocean between him and our shores.

We have but to say here in regard to the master-spirit of our city drama—Captain Coldgrip—that he is still the terror of evil-doers, that he never fails to bring to justice those he hunts, and that he considers his fight with the Dragon League one of his great exploits.

We may meet him again.

THE END.

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